MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL

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LIZ SUBURBIA | CHIMERA | CASCADE RECORD PRESSING
SCAVENGER OF DEATH | BELGIUM SCENE REPORT
THIS IS AUSTIN, NOT THAT GREAT

MRR
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Send records, demos, zines, and letters to PO Box 460760 San Francisco, CA 94146-0760

Send interviews, articles, scene reports, photos, and ads to mrr@maximumrocknroll.com.

Call us on the phone between 10AM and 10PM PST at (415) 923-9814.

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TOP TENS

Some of our contributors' top ten (or so) things we've reviewed this month. For review consideration, send two copies of vinyl, or one copy of CD-only or demo releases to our PO Box. We review independent punk, garage, and hardcore releases—no major labels!

PETER AVERY

CHEAP CLONE – EP
THE HOLDOUT – LP
CLEVERS – CD
LANDOWNER – Blatant LP
RAYS – LP
ASALTO – EP
DUDS – Immediate LP
STATES OF NATURE – live
HARLAN T. BOBO – LP
BLOOD COOKIE – LP

MATT BADENHOP

SENSUAL WORLD – tape
MORUS – Ciało Obce LP
P.O.S. – S.O.P EP
BLOOD PRESSURE – Surrounded LP
V/A – Trouble with a Capital T LP
CHEAP NASTIES – LP
CONVENIENCE – EP
FORWARD – live
RIPCORD – Harvest Hardcore EP
WAR NOW – 8-track Demo tape

HEATHER BLOTTO

NATURE BOYS – live
HEALERS – live
BLOOD COOKIE – LP
EINERBANDE – 45
GINO AND THE GOONS – 45
LES ROBOTS – 45
MISCALCULATIONS – EP
NEW VOGUE – 45
NUEVA FUERZA – LP
SAUNA YOUTH – Deaths LP

MITCH CARDWELL

RAYS – LP
THE SMOG – 45
SAUNA YOUTH – Deaths LP
VODOVO – 45
V/A – Destroy All Art Vol. 2 LP
CHEAP NASTIES – LP
VANITY– Evening Reception LP
SICK THOUGHTS – LP
BLOODY HELL – EP
P.O.S. – S.O.P EP

VICKY CASSIS

WEAKENED FRIENDS – LP
LEOPARD PRINT TASER – EP
ASALTO – EP
CHEAP CLONE – EP
BASEMENT BENDERS – LP
VECTOR COMMAND – System 3 LP
RAYS – LP
MORUS – LP
LANDOWNER – LP
HOLLER HOUSE / TECHNICIAN – split EP

ROBERT COLLINS

ASALTO – EP / SMOKERS – EP
EINERBANDE – 45
GEIGER COUNTER – live
DIRTY WOMBS – live
CONVENIENCE – EP
MASSGRAVE – LP / BRAINOIL – LP
SVARTFÅGLARS BEGRAVNING – demos
MALIGNANT TUMOR – LP
DREAM DECAY – live
CORRODE – demo / FORWARD – live
V/A – Club Hits Vol. 1 tape

JOAN DETORO

A puzzled panther...

MIRANDA FISHER

BLOODY HELL – EP
V/A – Destroy All Art Vol. 2 LP
RAYS – LP
BABY GRANDE – LP
V/A – Trouble with a Capital T LP
SAUNA YOUTH – Deaths LP
VANITY– Evening Reception LP
EINERBANDE – 45
DUDS – Immediate LP
TEENAGE CAVEGIRL – 45

LAYLA GIBBON

VECTOR COMMAND – System 3 LP
RAYS – LP / THE SMOG – 45
LANDOWNER – Blatant LP
DUDS – Immediate LP
SAUNA YOUTH – Deaths LP
NEW VOGUE – 45
BLOODY HELL – EP
TEENAGE CAVEGIRL – 45
V/A – Destroy All Art Vol. 2 LP
V/A – Trouble with a Capital T LP

GREG HARVESTER

NOXEEMA – tape
NO REASON – tape
CONVENIENCE – EP
SMOKERS – EP
BASEMENT BENDERS – LP
SICK THOUGHTS – LP
V/A – Trouble with a Capital T LP
VECTOR COMMAND – System 3 LP
DUDS – Immediate LP
ATERPE – flexi

KENNY KAOS

HARLAN T. BOBO – LP
CRAZY SQUEEZE – LP
TELEPHONE LOVERS – 45
SUBSONICS – 45
SMOKERS – EP
CHEAP NASTIES – LP
NEIGHBORHOOD BRATS – 45
SAUNA YOUTH – Deaths LP
RAYS – LP
HAYLEY AND THE CRUSHERS – LP

CAROLYN KEDDY

CELEBRITY HANDSHAKE – 45
BLOODY HELL – EP / SICK THOUGHTS LP
TEENAGE CAVEGIRL – 45
GINO AND THE GOONS – 45
KEVIN K & THE KRAZY KATS – EP
SMOKERS – EP / SUBSONICS – 45
CHEAP NASTIES – LP
VECTOR COMMAND – System 3 LP
V/A – Destroy All Art Vol. 2 LP
JULIETTE SEIZURE & THE TREMOR DOLLS

RAY LUJAN

BASEMENT BENDERS – LP
BLACK MAMBAS – Moderation LP
BURGER WEEKENDS – EP
CRAZY SQUEEZE – LP
NEIGHBORHOOD BRATS – LP
THE RATCHETS – First Light LP
SMOKERS – EP
TELEPHONE LOVERS – LP
VECTOR COMMAND – System 3 LP
WEAKENED FRIENDS – LP
DOA – live / RED CITY RADIO – live

FRED SCHRUNK

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Write mrr@maximumrocknroll.com.

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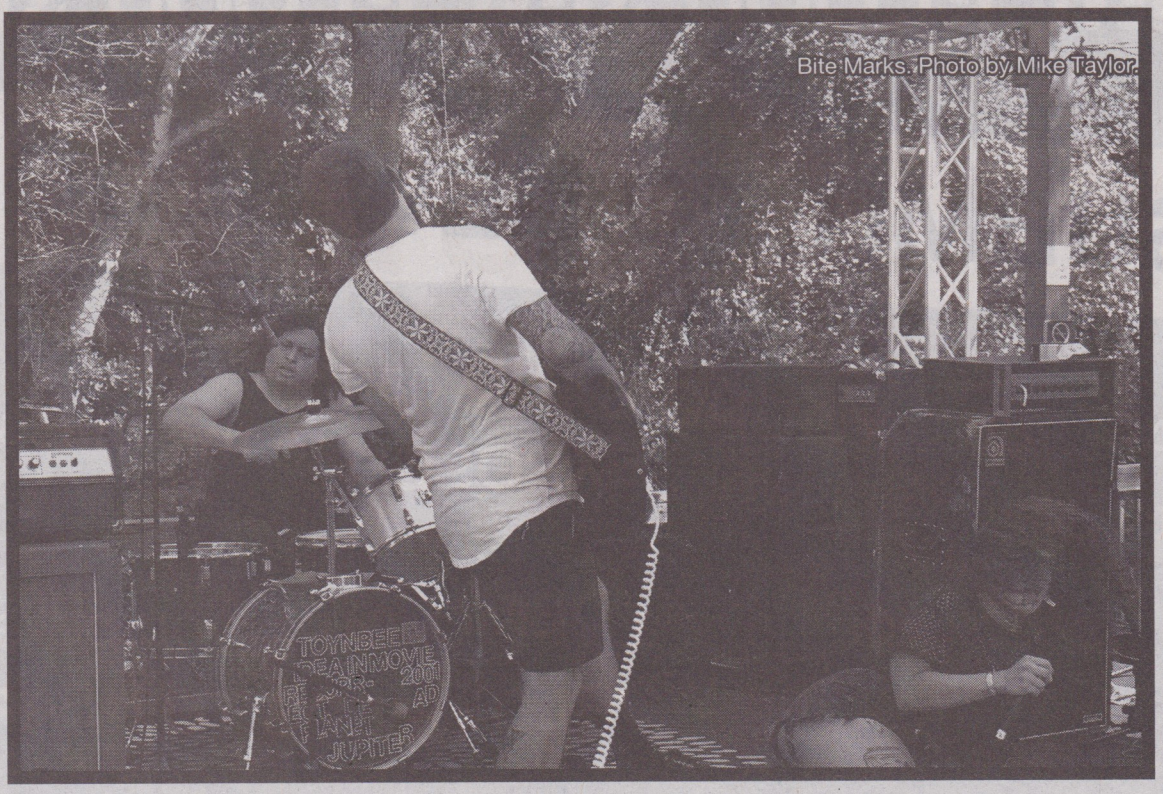

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We're still searching for a new Content Coordinator! If you're the organized, responsible hero this punk magazine needs, get in touch at mrr@maximumrocknroll.com to find out how to apply. We're closing applications soon, so don't hesitate!

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NEW BLOOD NEW BLOOD NEW BLOOD

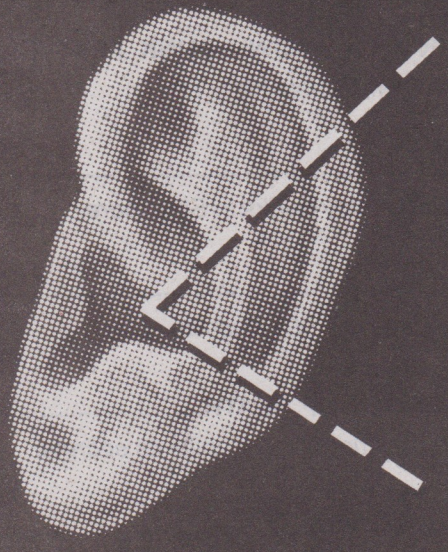
SUBMIT TO NEW BLOOD!

Are you a **YOUNG BAND** eager to have your work **EXPOSED** to the masses?

Do you have a **DEMO TAPE** you believe the **WORLD NEEDS TO HEAR!?**

Our NEW BLOOD feature is the easiest way outside of the review section to be included in Maximum Rocknroll! Every Friday, we post a new NEW BLOOD feature to our website, and yours can be up for consideration!

Send us the following info to be considered:



- Your band's name and contact info!
- A photo and credit!
- Give us some links!
- Tell us the date & location formed!
- How did your band come to be?
- Tell us what your lyrics are about!
- How do you describe your sound?
- List SOMETHING or SOMEONE you think folks need to listen to RIGHT NOW!
- What's in the FUTURE for this band?

Go to maximumrocknroll.com/new_blood to submit your band!

NEW BLOOD NEW BLOOD NEW BLOOD NEW BLOOD NEW BLOOD NEW BLOOD NEW BLOOD NEW BLOOD NEW BLOOD NEW BLOOD NEW BLOOD NEW BLOOD

LETTERS

Send letters to PO Box 460760, San Francisco, CA 94146 USA or to mrr@maximumrocknroll.com. Letters may be edited for length. Response not guaranteed.

Hello *MRR*-
Thanks to Andrew Underwood for the recent review of the Dead of Night 7". Andrew's review was quite a bit different than I expected, but very well-thought out and interesting. It's always great to see that a reviewer has given a record a very serious listen. Thanks for the honest and thoughtful review, and it was interesting to read your unexpected take on the record.

Although the review said there was no contact information or internet presence at all, that is not entirely correct. The "Contacts" section after the reviews had the correct label info (redmenacerecords.storenvy.com). Additional contact information is deadofnightusa.bandcamp.com and facebook.com/DeadofNightUSA.

In a time when so many zines are disappearing, it's great to see *MRR* still going at more than 400 issues. Whether it was reading *MRR* for the first time as a teenager or reading the review of the first Dead of Night demo over a decade ago or reading the latest issue, seeing a new issue of *MRR* is always inspiring and it should never be taken for granted.
Thanks,

Brian DeMoa
Dead of Night / Misled Media/Red Menace Records

To the coordinators of *MRR*,
This is going to be the last letter that I write in regards to the unjustified boycott of Israeli punks in *MRR*. I'd like to both put this issue to rest and also to stop contributing any content to the magazine for the time being.

First of all, the idea to have an Israeli scene report came about because different MRR shitworkers and readers were asking me to do it and said that they're interested in what punks in Israel are doing. Before you became the coordinators, I was getting asked by different people at *MRR* to submit interviews with Israeli punks. The Israeli scene is a small scene of a couple of hundred people who are mostly leftist, anarchists, and anti-occupation. People who avoid mandatory military service and face related consequences. The nature of the Israeli punk scene is political, since Israel itself is a highly politicized country. A large majority of the punks organize against the occupation and promote solidarity with Palestinians. One of the more recent projects I witnessed was a group that collects medicine at punk shows and delivers it to families in Gaza that are under the Israeli blockade. I agree with you that the voices of Israelis shouldn't be prioritized over the voices of Palestinians, but having a scene report or an interview is not meant to erase Palestinian voices, just like having an Oklahoma scene report isn't meant to erase the voices of indigenous people. The scene report and the interviews were not meant to be Israelis talking for or over Palestinians. It was meant to be Israelis talking about what they're doing as punks in a fucked up country. No one is denying your right to be anti-Zionist or pro-Palestinian or pro-BDS. No one has asked you not to run scene reports or interviews with Palestinians. The BDS website is clear that Israeli artists that should be boycotted are those who receive funding from the state and those who support or are implicit in the occupation. Punk bands who sing and act against their state do not receive funding from it, do not condone the occupation, and most of the time find ways around paying taxes that would go back to the state.

Secondly, I have to point out that I, and some other Jewish punks that I talked to, don't feel comfortable with non-Jewish people dismissing allegations of anti-semitism so lightly. Being pro-Palestine or pro-BDS is not inherently anti-semitic, but the righteous plight of Palestinian liberation does in fact attract anti-semites, unfortunately. If you are not Jewish, you don't get to simply brush it off by stating that you're not anti-semitic, and that's it, end of story. Your intentions in boycotting Israeli bands might have been good (and by looking at the work that you've done and meeting you a few times I believe that they were), but boycotting half of the world's Jewish population seems a little anti-semitic to me, especially when no one else is being boycotted for merely being born in certain country or having a specific ethnicity / nationality. I might be clueless about this, but I don't know of anyone else who has been boycotted by *MRR* simply for their ethnicity except for Jewish Israelis. So yeah, that's anti-semitic, and my advice is that you take a step back and reflect. Again, participating in a boycott against the Jewish state is not the reason why this seems anti-semitic, I mentioned before that I don't think the BDS is inherently anti-semitic. I could care less if you boycotted Israeli companies, artists who support the occupation or are complicit in it, academics, or the Israeli government. What makes this look anti-semitic is that for the first time in the magazine's history, it is boycotting people based on their nationality and not their ideas or actions. It is boycotting other punks, who share the same values as many punks everywhere else in the world, because they are Israeli. When people attend talks by Israeli members of Anarchists Against the Wall or Jewish Voice for Peace, they are not violating the BDS. When people go see Israeli punk bands, they do not violate the BDS. I've never heard of an Israeli punk band being boycotted in Europe or in America. Punks worldwide reject states and borders—your decision reinforces those concepts.

Thirdly, I'd also like to respond to some points that were raised in the only letter that supports your boycott. In the letter, the writer mentions first that no one is suggesting a boycott of Israeli people or people in Israel. The writer goes on to say that the fact that anyone is going to that place is reactionary, but then a few paragraphs later he writes: "... BDS is not just about consumer goods, it's about checking the whole culture that is Israel. That culture includes all the subcultures, all the

activists, and all the punks, and all the musicians." Maybe I don't understand how that statement is different from suggesting a boycott of Israeli people. The thing that stands out to me the most is the double standard that comes next; he writes, "as of right now you cannot have one without the other, and until the state of Israel is dismantled and Palestinians are given the full right of return, the cultural boycott of Israel and Zionism stands, and will stay." If I read this correctly, the only way for Israeli punks to avoid being boycotted is by dismantling the state of Israel. The demand here is not for Israel to stop its human rights violations, the occupation, the racism, and the apartheid. The demand here is for Israelis to dismantle their state. Now, dismantling states is something I support, as I'm sure many punks do, but notice that nobody else in the world is being asked of this but Jewish Israelis. I do not support Zionism and I do not support the state of Israel, but saying that until they dismantle their state, Israelis will be boycotted is a huge double standard. Maybe you can share with other *MRR* readers who else is being asked to do this. Americans, Canadians, and Australians are definitely not being asked to do that, and punks are settlers in those countries as well.

The last point I want to make is that for those who were hoping that this would be resolved—unfortunately my impression is that no one in Israel wants to write any content for *MRR* anyway anymore, so I guess problem solved. Thank you *MRR* for alienating a scene of 200 radicals in one of the most fucked up places in the world. My friends in Israel told me that they are more excited about playing shows in Turkey, releasing splits with bands from Algeria, and making connections with punks in the Middle East and in other countries that they are not allowed to go to than submitting scene reports for some elitist hipster magazine out of San Francisco. I understand where they're coming from. One friend actually said that it seems there are only two entities right now that don't want people to know about Israeli punk, and those are *MRR* and the Israeli state. And just for the record, as an Israeli citizen, I acknowledge that Israel is a racist state that practices apartheid on stolen lands. I am absolutely against the immoral occupation of Palestine. Nothing in this letter should be misinterpreted as support for the state of Israel and its policies. This is also not to make it seem like I have done everything in my power to oppose the occupation of Palestine. There are things that everyone, including Israeli and American punks, can and should do to support this struggle. This letter serves, to me at least, to close out this chapter and to express my absolute disappointment with a magazine that I used to love and volunteer at.

Peace, Salam, Shalom,
Daniel Becker

Hi Daniel,

I want to apologize for the way the coordinator decision to not run an Israeli scene report went down. It's true that we were three non-Jewish people who frantically made a rushed decision without having a nuanced understanding of how anti-semitism relates to taking a stance against the Israeli apartheid of Palestinian people. Again, I'm sorry we made you feel silenced in our disorganization and lack of process. I understand that it must've been really frustrating to be encouraged by other coordinators at the magazine to work on a scene report, and for us to shut it down in a way that felt out of the blue.

A major issue in the background of Maximum Rocknroll is the lack of decision-making process, especially around content-related decisions. In my understanding, the way decisions have been made since Tim Yo died have been at the whim of whoever was coordinating content at the time. Of course there's been input from whoever was actively involved at the time, but there's never been any formal way to make decisions that reflect the magazine's politics and ethics. Furthermore, there's no official framework from which we make political decisions as a group. Maybe there was when Tim was around, but the make-up of the group organizing the magazine has changed so much and so many times since then that whatever groundwork there was has been lost in the mix.

Personally, I didn't hear about the idea of the scene report until Joan wrote about being excited about it in her column earlier this year. That's when most people involved at the magazine learned about it as well, and they spoke up to us about their feelings on it. Honestly, our friends and fellow contributors got mad at us for even considering running an Israeli scene report, we froze up, and shut it down under pressure to make a timely decision. I'm really sorry about how quickly the decision flipped on you, and we should have had that in person conversation with you before considering any decision.

Your experience and input is important, and I wish you had further considered our idea we talked about in person of writing a column about your experience as an Israeli who was radicalized through punk. Face to face, I felt like we all came to a mutual understanding about the coordinators' decision to not uplift Israeli voices during this time when there's a specific call to action by people who are facing daily genocide. For those reasons, it was confusing when you made a Facebook post the next day that stated we were silencing you.

At the time that we met in person, I didn't yet understand that the BDS movement isn't unified in politics, and that there are many anti-Jewish factions within in. My understanding of BDS was that it was anti-colonialism and anti-apartheid of the Palestinian people. I see now that to say you are pro-BDS can be read as being anti-Jewish if it's not coming from an anti-state political framework. Had the magazine had a statement or document that defined ways in which we operate politically, then I believe our decision wouldn't have been construed in such a way. We don't believe that Judaism is to blame for the genocide of Palestinians; we put the blame on the colonialist state of Israel.

Shortly after we published our decision to not run the scene report, someone within our group suggested that we meet to start developing a political points of unity. This is a great idea, and we're working toward it, but there's so much more internal organizing that this group needs to do first. We've started having all-coordinator meetings to figure out how we want to organize our decision-making process, which feels like step one. Now that we've begun the process of implementing consensus decision-making, we can work toward talking about and consenting to a political points of unity that can help guide our framework for making decisions like uplifting the voices of a boycott.

As an international publication, it's important to us to mitigate harm when and where we can. Until we have a political framework to operate from, I think it's safe to say that when there's a call to action we will err on the side of the oppressed. This world is fucked in so many ways, and yes the United States is a capitalist, colonialist, systemically oppressive country, but that is not to distract from the unique call to end the genocide and colonization of the Palestinian people. To pose BDS against other people's struggles is to sidestep and minimizes the violence happening in occupied Palestine, so I will not address the way you compare an Israeli scene report to an Oklahoma scene report. We are trying our best to create a space that highlights the voices of liberation movements, especially within punk, and we understand that there are voices in Israel that deserve recognition in their struggles and efforts. But in the instance of voices coming from within Palestine and Israel, we are going to listen the Palestinian voices who are getting more and more silenced with each day.
We hope you can understand where we're coming from.

Best,
Vicky & MRR

Dear Daniel,
I feel tired, I fell annoyed, and I feel frustrated. So this will be short.

You continue to sidestep and negate experiences, placing your own ideas and values over others. We are not talking about millions of other injustices happening across the world. We are talking about a direct ask from Palestinian peoples. We clearly have have a different idea of what that ask is, how to deconstruct and smash racism and apartheid, and how to even discuss this issue. I understand this is personal for you, because its extremely personal to me.

To be honest, I have nothing more to say to you because I am not interested in validating you anymore. *MRR* offered you, an Israeli, an outlet to discuss how you were radicalized, how you let go of your zionist views. A column that you could have used to help people understand your position, your story, and your experience and the experiences of other ex-zonists. Behind closed doors you decided against it, and went on to publicly talk shit on the mag and spread false information. So I am done.

To other Arabs, other anti-zionists, MENA folks, please write in. Please. Please show the international punk community that *MRR* and I are not alone. If anyone wants to just send me a nice letter, or connect, if you're an Arab, MENA, or POC, hit me up. I am sick of getting shitty letters and having to do emotional labor that feels regressive.

Punk is political. Punk is personal. Fuck white supremacy. Decolonize punk.

Thank you for reading.
write to:
ATT: Ramy
Maximum Rocknroll
PO Box 460760
San Francisco, CA 94146-0760
USA
or email me: smashthemdead@gmail.com

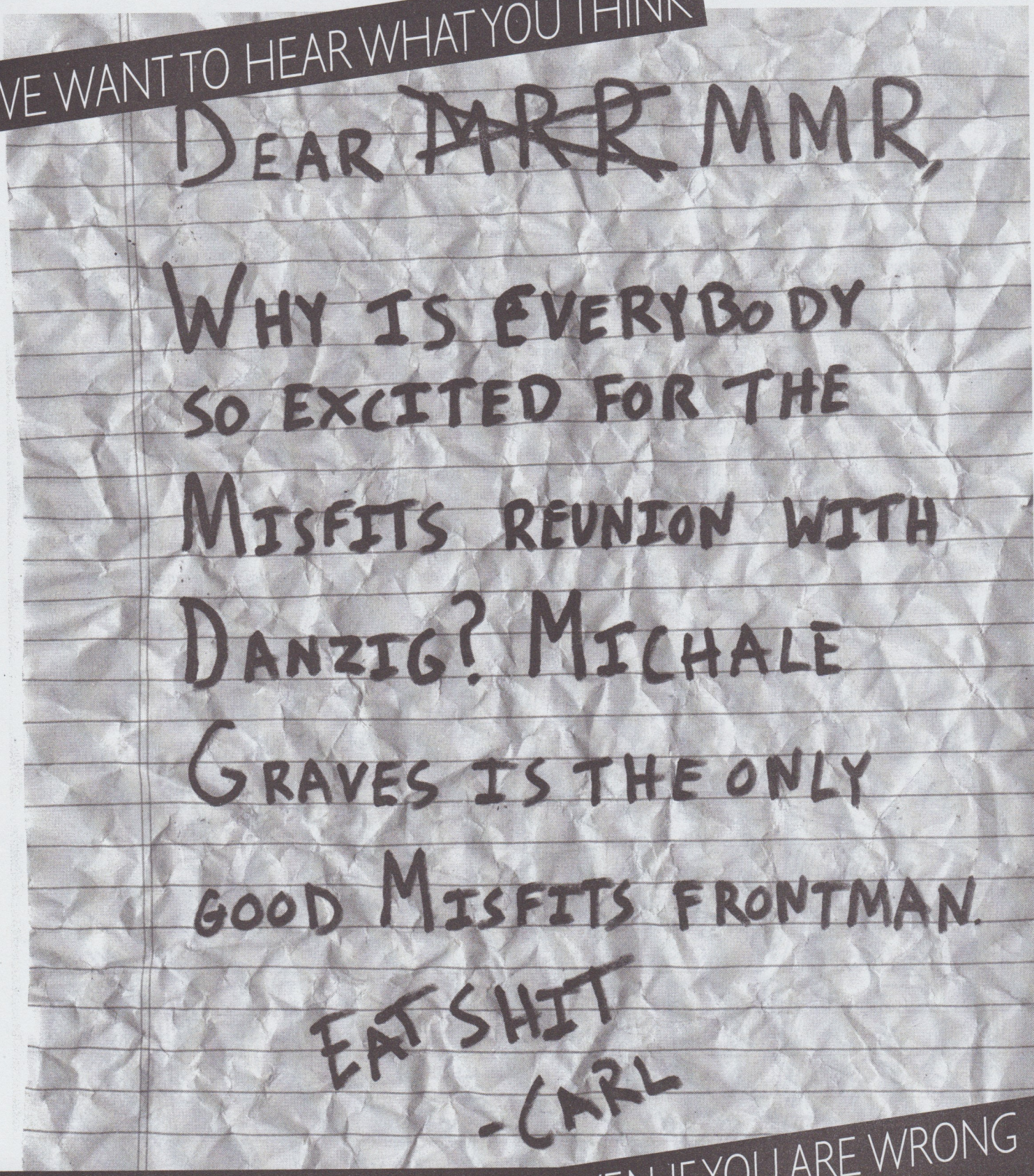
Stay Up,
Ramy

Dear *MRR*,
Imagine my surprise when I saw back to back issues with no letters section! I never thought I would care about a letters section, but this is *MRR* we're talking about! THE international DIY punk magazine that we all love to smear our thumbs with newsprint to (or maybe it's just me, I'm not a stranger to sweaty hands). I suppose the letters section always represented this big, ethereal communication hub as some dumb kid getting into punk, and as I grew up, the letters continued to mean more and more. So many ideas, and turns of phrase, and the debates! THE DEBATES!!!! And I'm to believe punks (or whatever it is we label ourselves as, if at all) aren't willing to voice their opinions?!? NO!!!! I refuse to let the letters section die! Also, always wanted to be printed in *MRR*, and if this makes it, I can die happy hahaha!!!!
Your pal,

Robbie Papenfus
Dayton, OH

Hope this issue's robust letters section satisfies you, Robbie...
—Miranda

WE WANT TO HEAR WHAT YOU THINK



...EVEN IF YOU ARE WRONG

Send your letters to
MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL
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COLUMNS

If you've ever got fifteen minutes to spare and need something to laugh at, I'd highly recommend reading THE DAMNED's bio on their website. It's a stirring emotional rollercoaster that describes that band as "spiritually chaotic," having "superior musicality" (according the punk rock connoisseurs LED ZEPPELIN), "brooding nocturnalists" and "still a seat-of-the-pants DIY operation" who won't hesitate to "stump up cash" from fans in order to record an expensive new album with the producer of DAVID BOWIE's Blackstar. Not that they should even have to pay him, since any true punk knows that that record borrows from the DAMNED classic "Curtain Call."

Naturally, when I heard that "the greatest surviving British punk band, bar none" were playing a mere hour and half away, I simply had to convince my dad to let me go. I didn't expect much more than a chance to slam-dance to a few songs off of their first record that I had gotten into around sixth grade, but what I got was so much more. Yes, it was the second worst show I've ever been to (the first being a crazy expensive ELVIS COSTELLO show). But, as a *real punk rocker*, I am totally willing to sit through multiple encores of music that sounds like it's being played by faux-depressed English majors in the mid-'80s who wish they were Joy Division in order to earn a pantload of Real Punk Rock Points.

Not only did the music seem like it would have been very popular in Spain in the early 2000s if they replaced with Dave Vanian with a greasy creep with aviator sunglasses and abnormally large pecs, but the band were being complete assholes. That goes double for self-described "enviably gifted guitarist" Captain Sensible. His wah-wah pedal broke multiple times throughout the set. Instead of fixing ir or simply unplugging it and continuing with the set, he shouted at the poor guy who had the misfortune of being their roadie to come fix it. This guy is sweating his brains out, trying to figure out how to fix a nonessential piece of gear, while the "lifelong DIY-ers" in the band lead the crowd in a chant about how he's a wanker. This was followed by a chant about how Clapton is a wanker. At least Clapton could fix his fucking wah-wah pedal.

But by far the best part of the night came as I was heading home from the show. As my dad and I were rounding the corner to head home, we saw the one and only Captain Sensible walking into his dressing room (at this particular venue, bands enter the dressing room from the street, which is pretty cool if they're nice people to talk to), flanked by four or five massive bouncers. I make an effort to ask musician I admire for their advice on playing music, whenever I get the chance. Even though the only thing I admire about Captain Sensible is his utter obliviousness about his own ridiculous hypocrisy, I owed it to myself to go try and talk to him.

It's worth mentioning that, in addition to all his other horribleness, Captain Sensible is one of those guys that thinks that you physically cannot enjoy a certain type of music if you're not above a certain age. I mean, in the bands bio, he says that young people won't get the references they're making not once, not twice, but three times. Plus there's this almost inexplicable gem: "Where are today's anti-war marches? Whatever happened to the beautiful hippy dream of worldwide peace and love?" With this in mind, it not surprising that when I ran after him, sounding like one of the students in *Dead Poets Society*, Captain Sensible completely ignored me. I was only about three feet away from him too, when one of his bodyguards pulled me back as he walked through the door. Just as the door was closing, I turned to my dad and said loudly "That's DIY for you, buddy!!!" I guess the Captain heard this and thought better of himself, because he came out the door moments later and humored me for a few moments.

And that's basically it. I suppose the point of this story, besides showing off how punk rock I am, is to give an example of what not to be. Captain Sensible is just a very exaggerated version of one of the reasons I started writing this column in the first place. Which brings me to the part where I say I want to hear from you! If you're eighteen or under and you make cool stuff, or you just want to talk about your experiences (or anything else), hit me up at carmenservon@gmail.com.

Oh, and by the way, Captain Sensible's advice for playing music was something like: "Learn to write songs. Because then they can't *sack* you. Write a song idea everyday." Not bad, Captain. I'll give you that.

NAKED ROOMMATE is the latest project from Amber and Andy of the WORLD (not to mention a slew of other former or current Bay Area bands between the two of them), and though there's definitely some echoes of the latter group's skronked out, early Rough Trade-aligned post-punk gyrations on NAKED ROOMMATE's self-titled debut cassette, they also wander down some other very disparate and sneaky pathways here. The buzzing keyboards and clattering drum machine pulse in "Fondu Guru" and "Love Gains" hit a similar thrift-shopped minimal synth aesthetic as CRASH COURSE IN SCIENCE, while Amber's deadpan vocals over the jittery new wave basslines in "I Need A Slob" and "Lube Boys" evoke the loopy, Su Tissue-centered side of SUBURBAN LAWNS. Of the tape's six songs, "John Is Gone" probably comes closest to the WORLD's spiky rhythms, only stripped of the fiery dual saxophone clash and skimming a sparse, ESG-worthy bass / drum tumble occasionally punctuated by bongos and clanging metallic percussion. Limited to 100 copies with a great risographed cover (clearly a band after my own heart here); get in while y'all still can. (nakedroommate.bandcamp.com)

Julius of Gothenburg, Sweden's foremost shambolic punks SKIFTANDE ENHETER is behind two other projects with new 7" releases in the last month, and each single continues

his fixation with the halcyon '78–'83 DIY era, albeit in ways that go beyond SKIFTANDE ENHETER's economically ramshackle DESPERATE BICYCLES / SWELL MAPS approach. JJ ULIUS is his solo endeavor into perfectly crafted, threadbare pop along the lines of TELEVISION PERSONALITIES, CLEANERS FROM VENUS, and if you want to go really deep, the brilliant, one-off single from VOICE OF THE PUPPETS. "Tänder Ett Ljus" sounds like it could unravel at any moment, with some trebly guitar jangle pinned in the red, cheap organ warble, cardbox box-quality drumming, and nonchalant vocals (in Swedish), all over and done in two minutes flat. The BUZZCOCKS have been thrown around as a reference point by people who aren't me, and I could maybe see that, if the more subdued and pining hooks of the post-Howard Devoto era were recast into the sort of lo-fi, bedroom home-recording context befitting the PASTELS or the VASELINES. Then there's MONOKULTUR, his dystopian-punk duo with Elin Engström (formerly of Slumberland-backed C86 revivalists LIECHTENSTEIN and also currently of SKIFTANDE ENHETER) with a new four-song EP on I Dischi Del Barone that crawls through the sort of dimly-lit, post-industrial urban decay occupied by bands like CABARET VOLTAIRE and the NORMAL on the other side of this century. The cavernously echoed vocals and warped motorik beat running through "Lindholmen-Stenpiren" could have been pulled from a secondhand dub of a THIS HEAT cassette after it'd been slightly mangled in a tape deck, and "Äckel" slinks into some skeletal and slow-burning futuristic dub with reverberations of spectral synth. Swedish DIY domination now! (Happiest Place, happiestplacerecords.bandcamp.com; I Dischi Del Barone, monokultur.bandcamp.com)

Outer Reaches is a new UK-based record label with a focus on the far edges of the weirdo DIY fringe, and you can't really argue with the statement of intent made by their very first release, a reissue of the one-and-done 1983 single from scrappy English art-punks GARAGE CLASS. The 7" originally appeared on Gymnasium Records, the label started by the equally scrappy UK DIY combo HAPPY REFUGEES, who technically formed in the wake of GARAGE CLASS (the single was recorded in 1980 but didn't physically materialize until a few years later) and whose vocalist Tim Shutt provides the overlap between the lineups of both groups. A-side "Terminal Tokyo" is textbook *Messthetics* material—total freewheeling, primitive glam clamor with emotionally detached monotone vocals, off-kilter handclaps, wiry guitar, and just a touch of first-gen punk sleaze for a result that's one part NEON BOYS and one part SOFT BOYS. In a somewhat odd move, the reissue adds two versions of a previously unreleased track called "I Got Standards" (one original take, and one contemporary dancefloor banger remix by JD Twitch) in place of the frantic, punky thrash of the single's B-side "One Hell of a Kiss"... and did I mention that the Outer Reaches edition of this record was pressed on that most dreaded of all vinyl formats, by which I mean, of course, the 10"? Just include both sides of the 7" AND throw in the bonus odds and ends if you've got the extra inches to spare! At any rate, the raw version of "I Got Standards" is great, channeling a darkly psychedelic TELEVISION PERSONALITIES / Whaam! Records mod-pop sound and throwing in the extremely Dan Treacy-ish line "*I'm pretty young but I don't take chances / I once had a girl like Jackie Onassis*" for good measure. Brilliantly amateurish, amateurishly brilliant, and necessary enough for me to actually recommend that you buy a new 10" record in 2018. And a side note: Outer Reaches also just reissued the incredible, painfully hard-to-find single from early '80s minimalist post-punks INDIFFERENT DANCE CENTRE that I've previously raved about in this column, so use those postage funds wisely and grab both records while you're at it. (Outer Reaches, outerreaches.bandcamp.com)

The one and only 7" from early '80s Canadian post-punks the HUNGER PROJECT was something that I came across entirely randomly and without any background context whatsoever, so it was more than a little strange when I finally did some research on the record and found out that half of the band actually wound up in the COWBOY JUNKIES after their first group fell apart. Stay with me here, though! So, the HUNGER PROJECT formed in Toronto in 1979, allegedly after being inspired by the first wave of post-punk coming from the UK, and it definitely shows on the single—it was actually released in 1983 after the band had relocated to the United Kingdom, following a spell spent in New York's Lower East Side where their take on moody, atmospheric 4AD-style post-punk was likely a little out of step with the confrontational and caustic downtown No Wave scene that was enjoying its heyday circa 1981. Singer Liza Dawson-Whisker's dark, dramatic vocals suggest a slightly introverted SIOUXSIE SIOUX, and the twin guitars (they didn't have a bassist) alternate between the sort of chorused chime that bands like the CHAMELEONS were concurrently exploring (the gothy A-side "Assembly") and a jagged, staccato harsh-funk slash descended straight from GANG OF FOUR (the sprawling seven minutes of "The Same Inside" on the flip). An unexpected femme-punk gem, and worlds away from what any "ex-COWBOY JUNKIES" associations might conjure in your mind.

Say hey at ripitupstartagain@gmail.com, more sights and sounds at futuresandpasts.org.

FTP: A Love Letter From One Harm Reductionist

This month's column comes to you from anonymous donor (anonymous to you, not to me). This person is an accomplished and decorated harm reduction vet who knows what the fuck is up, so without any further ado—

I spend a lot of time ranting about the cops and it pisses people off. Most of my fellow harm reductionists don't really say anything to me directly, but I hear that my friends who are working with the cops sometimes feel bad because I am so critical of harm reduction programs working with them. My own partner works for a pre-arrest diversion program that is supposed to be harm reduction-based but I regale him with (almost daily) critiques of how that's complete bullshit. The other day, he said to me, "today we did some good work with people, I don't care what you say." I felt bad, because he does do amazing, difficult work. But honestly, that's not the point, I know they do good work—*but it's despite the cops, not because of them.* It makes for great dinner conversations around here in my house, always fun. I know people think I'm being "difficult" and stubborn in my belief that we have made a huge mistake in creating alliances with law enforcement. I don't really care, and it's strange to me that people who understand themselves to be part of a social justice movement would be willing to cede so much power to cops without thought of the long-term repercussions. It sure doesn't make me a ton of friends, but that's ok.

I have been working in harm reduction for almost twenty years, and I chose this

ragtag, radical, and radically fucked up group of people as my family because I believed in harm reduction as a movement based on social justice—freedom and liberation of people from stigma, discrimination, violence, disease, preventable death, and the carceral systems of traditional drug treatment and prison. Bear with me because this sounds grim and super goth, but this movement for me has also been about death and our relationship to it as inevitable, yet delayable and preventable. We try to prevent it in the literal, immediate sense (overdose prevention / Narcan) and through indirect ways (preventing HIV / HCV / injection related infections), and by deconstructing the systems and structures that perpetuate death like poverty, racism, gender-and sex-based violence, and the criminal justice system. Then we spend much of the rest of the time grieving those that didn't make it and desperately trying to speak their names and make their faces seen as people whose deaths should not go unnoticed and whose lives were important and to let the world know we fucking loved them. So that being said, I believe that police, policing, and the prison industrial complex are in *direct opposition* to all that we are working to lift up and all that we are trying to dismantle. Police have always been the frontline workers in efforts to hold up the deadly, racist, classist drug war; they are not our friends. They are the institutional mechanism that is responsible for carrying out the death sentence for people we love and our communities.

Since the first days of syringe exchange, cops have shut down our programs, harassed our participants, arrested people accessing and providing services, organized within their associations to increase penalties for drug-related offenses and fought the advancement of legal protections for harm reduction programs and people who use drugs and engage in sex work. They are the foot soldiers of the racist drug war, and it's their cash cow. Why would they want to dismantle it and put themselves out of a job? (Hint: they don't want to). Yet... somewhere along the line, harm reduction folks decided that we should start hanging tight with them, and it's mostly a fucking disaster.

I know all the arguments, I get it: we need them to leave us alone. Some people go so far as to say we need their permission to do what we need to do. Harm reductionists have been doing trainings with cops for a really long time—they'll go and do one about how syringe exchange helps cops not get stuck by needles or something. I've done it, quite a few times. One time I did a whole training on Hep C for some cops who refused to face me and my co-worker, who was a woman of color with a history of incarceration and drug use—someone they were not about to listen to as an expert on anything. They literally sat with their backs to us and snickered. My powerful, resilient, badass co-worker left that training almost in tears, deflated by their disregard. It was fucking traumatizing to be treated like that by those pigs. Many years later, the health department that funds my program made me do some Narcan trainings for the cops in the city where I work now. I agreed, in exchange for a shitload of money for my program that I could spend on Narcan and another staff person. So, for my punishment for asking for that money, I had to stand there in front of a blue wall of 75 officers talking to them about overdose and they were laughing, and muttering to each other the whole time. During the "practice" section I heard them talking and snickering with one another about all the times they had seen overdoses and how funny it was. How they couldn't believe now they have to save these people.

I think there is an honest belief that we can help them understand that the people whose faces they're smashing into the sidewalk as they zip tie their hands and call them "junkie" are actually *humans*, and then they'll be nicer to them. We think if we beg them for a seat at their table then maybe we could make them kindler and gentler, or that we could get them to agree to a buffer zone where they won't bother our programs or folks trying to get services. In towns and cities all over this country harm reduction programs have forged alliances with cops to try to get them to stand down, to leave us alone, and to be nicer. I know and understand that this is strategic and is often the only way a program can survive. If the police decide to make your lives hell, they certainly will, and for the protection of everyone, you must neutralize them and make sure they will get out of your way. *I get it.*

However, there are a couple fundamental problems with this. We do not have lasting systemic impact on the institution of policing, the benefits of these alliances are not experienced by all communities or even all the people in a given community, *and* there have been some very real, very dangerous consequences that have come from these buddy-buddy situations. As the drug war escalates under Chief White Supremacist Jeff Sessions and these other monsters, I don't see "harm reduction" law enforcement officers suggesting policy, I see a doubling down on drug war rhetoric. More racialized fear-mongering about who is bringing in all the drugs and poisoning the good white folk of America. Build a wall. More drug-induced homicide charges. New penalties for fentanyl(s) that are being pitched as "protecting the innocent victims of the opioid epidemic" but are intended only to continue to fill the jails with black and brown people—as the drug war has always done and has always intended to do.

I see the failures of diversion programs where the cops are the primary decision-makers, and they are still doing massive city-wide sweeps for low-level drug offenses and "quality of life violations," but now they're employing harm reduction workers alongside them to do their dirty work. No wonder people call the poor harm reduction outreach workers the "snitch program." It's depressing to see people I love and believe in getting silenced and start to lose faith in the program that they thought was going to help keep folks out of prison and really make change to the broken system.

I see cops who have been given even more power over the bodies and survival of people who use drugs by carrying Narcan now advocating for involuntary treatment and other coercive measures (*"we just keep Narcanning them and then we have to release them, we need to be able to arrest them or force them into treatment"*). Story after story of cops excessively Narcanning people, or Narcanning them when not even overdosing as punishment, or Narcanning people and then arresting them, or refusing to Narcan them because they won't touch them (keep reading, more on this below), or people who use drugs not calling 911 because they don't want cops with Narcan responding. I see millions of dollars from the feds coming to states that should be going to harm reduction programs and other public health / substance use treatment programs and the money is going to buy Narcan for cops (and sometimes their dogs!). In the state where I live, $19 million recently came through for narcan via SAMHSA, and it was stated in their materials that it was for "law enforcement, EMS / Fire [who can and do buy their own, so not sure what that's about], Schools [for all the kids overdosing at school—hint there is literally *zero* data supporting the need for this] and religious institutions." What the fuck? Harm reduction programs and syringe exchanges are actually the places that distribute Naloxone and people who use drugs are the ones responsible for saving the vast majority of lives with Narcan—but go ahead and give it all to cops and schools and churches. Thanks again, America.

I see cops constantly interviewed as experts by media about the "opioid epidemic" and referred to as the people "on the frontlines" battling this scourge or whatever they're calling it. Their voices are centered as the experts, the heroes, the victims (*"we touch fentanyl and overdose and we have to Narcan ourselves!"*), and *the answer* to the problem—

COLUMNS

if we keep giving them more funding. This is classic drug war rhetoric and they've been using it for decades to fill their coffers with money squeezed from the fear and hysteria of white America. They recently used the bullshit fentanyl-touching nonsense to request a $2.5 million increase to the 2019 DEA budget to buy protective gear and Narcan for themselves and their dogs in case they touch fentanyl.

Side note, this whole column was supposed to be about the cops-touching-fentanyl-and-fake-overdosing bullshit but has actually just turned into a rambling general rant about how much I hate cops. But here's a quick summary if you're interested, and there is plenty of science and common sense to back this up if you want to do some further googling: *Cops think that touching fentanyl makes them overdose because of one stupid cop in Ohio in 2017 who probably snorted a line of it and then lied and said he "brushed it off his shirt" and overdosed. This started a firestorm of bullshit that continues to this day where article after article details how cops touched some fentanyl or walked into a room where fentanyl might have been and then they had what can only be understood as a panic attack (rapid heartbeat, shortness of breath, sweating, nervousness, fainting, etc.), none of which are symptoms of an opioid overdose at all...and then they Narcan themselves. It is so hard not to laugh at this. OK, I am actually laughing at it. But it's really not funny because it has turned into a fucking nightmare. They're using this to further escalate penalties for people who use drugs (the first "attempted assault on a police officer" charge has already emerged for someone having fentanyl near a cop) and they're leveraging this victimhood into more money for themselves. In some places they won't even administer narcan to an overdosing person until someone brings them a hazmat suit—which has resulted in people dying. In some communities, all the Narcan is going to cops because they're so afraid of their imagined drug-touching problem. Dudes, if we could touch drugs or be in the same room with drugs and get high we would, you are idiots. It's embarrassing. Stop. OK, moving on.*

Finally, I think the greatest falsehood of them all, is the belief if we can change the hearts and minds of "at least one officer" or even a few, or *even* a whole department maybe, then we can somehow make long-lasting systemic change to the culture of policing. I hear this all the time: *"they're not all bad," "this one officer cried when he heard us talk," "we have some real allies on the force, they get it, they're more like social workers!" "In our town the cops do outreach, they have a 'harm reduction' officer"* on an on...but this does not, has not, and cannot translate into *systemic institutional change*. The institution of police and policing is a violent, militarized, racist system / structure that will not cede power to us if asked nicely. It just does not work that way.

So what is the answer for us? I don't really know, I just have lots of swirling, ragey opinions about a lot of things. But I do think that in the moments and situations where harm reduction programs are choosing to work with police, they can have some boundaries and we can ask ourselves some questions—and if the answers aren't right, then we can *get out*. They have no charges on us, we are free to go.

I can think of a few things that we can ask ourselves, like; Is this alliance working to *minimize* the impact of police on people's lives or *increase* it? Are we relinquishing any of our (hard won) power or centering law enforcement as the experts or drivers of information and interventions? Is our *whole* community supportive of us working with cops and are they reaping benefit from this collaboration equally? Specifically thinking about heavily-policed and surveilled people like POC, queer and trans folks, people engaged in sex work, immigrants—how are these relationships with police impacting ALL people in community? Who is making the decision to work with cops, and whose voices and experience are included when making this decision? Are we giving cops our data, our time, or our resources in the hopes that we'll get something in return? Do we actually get those things? Is the bargaining all in their favor? Is our work with cops actually increasing the suffering of the people we are trying to be of service to? Does our collaboration with the police do anything to shift power and influence away from them? Will they stand up to advocate for decreased criminal penalties for people who use drugs and engage in sex work if they are asked to? Do we have to change our program structure / language / mission / goals to appease them? How does working with them impact our reputation in the community? Are we at their table or are they at ours? Are they referring journalists to us because we are actually the experts? Are they working collaboratively with us to get out of *our* way?

There are some of us who have to work with them, or that are choosing to work with them—and that will continue. But we cannot continue to engage in these relationships without critical thought, hard questioning and acknowledging that we have the option, and maybe the *duty* to leave. We should feel like we can always walk out of the room and sever the relationship if it does not serve us and the highest good of our whole communities.

Bandmates require time, attention, patience, forgiveness, stimulation, trust, and a general sense of commitment, same as a partner, and I believe that band relationships are just as important as any romantic relationship. They'll become a part of your life, good or bad, and if you're going to stay together all these things need to be addressed. That's what this column is here for: to discuss why bands fight, why bands work or don't work, why bands succeed, and why bands break up. In almost every way this is kind of a relationship column, to examine the fragile relationships that you have with your bandmates.

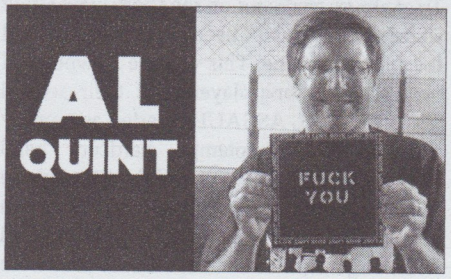
I've been really aggressive lately, it's been coming in bursts. I've mentioned here for the past few months (coming up on six now!) that I'm still getting adjusted to the stresses of my new job and how it's been affecting me. On the outside I'm fine. I'm, not really very snappy or combative, and to be honest the one mood I've been experiencing has just been drained and exhausted. My stomach has been knotted for a while, but on the outside you wouldn't even be able to tell. During the week I pretty much just go to work and then go home, peppered with some band practices. On the weekends I'm just catching up on sleep and writing, so my focus is pretty much just making it through these first months. Because of that I really haven't been going to shows lately. In SF we're spoiled because there's something happening somewhere pretty much every night, and up until six months ago I took advantage of the city most nights. At first I was all right with my new simplified lifestyle of work / anything else but eventually I needed to get that balance back in my life. So I started taking myself to shows again, but it was different this time. In Northern California I don't think the hardcore scene has ever really been dangerous. I've always known the pit to be a place to throw yourself into people, not attack them. For me it's always been more about catching punks rather then deliberately hurting them. Don't get me wrong, I've definitely taken an elbow or a shoe to the head but it was never really a deliberate shot. We're exuding energy, not aggression. So I've kind of scared myself lately at shows when the

band starts and everyone circles up and my adrenaline spikes. Lately it hasn't been like it was before. I feel less in control. I can feel my stomach unknotting and all the stress in my shoulders and my jaw unclench, but then my tolerance level drops to below zero and I feel like everyone that touches me is immediately inviting a fight. Recently, I actually saw red... that's never happened to me at a show before.

I think this is a big problem. Punk rock has always been a place for me to reset and cleanse my stress levels, but I don't want to be in a position where I'd be truly violent in that environment. (*I'd like to sidebar for a moment speak to the OG hardcore punks, and anyone else that might be confused or laughing at me right now. Yes, I know that back in the day hardcore was all about violence and fists in teeth and all that goodness, but that's never been a factor where I grew up. Rollins has a story about Huntington Beach psychos coming up to SF from LA and literally knocking punk's teeth out and splitting skulls open during shows at the Mab. If that's why you're here, then I hope that works out for you. I'm not here to draw blood, I'm just here to make a connection with strangers.)

I respect the environment at shows and I want to continue to make it a safe space for everyone. So, I think I'm going to keep myself home for the time being. I'm writing this a week before the 31st, and the NEKROMANTIX are playing at Gilman *on* Halloween(!!!), and I think I'm going to have to miss it. I seriously really really want to see that show, but if I'm not in a good place at the moment than that's something that I need to work through before I put myself in that environment. I don't think that punk rock is a place to dump your bullshit onto people, and if I'm harboring something that I'm not in control of at the moment then Gilman doesn't need to take the brunt of my current complex. If I go and something happens, someone shoves me the wrong way or I get some kind of trigger and lose my control, then it damages the trust and camaraderie of the room. I don't want genuine intentional violence in punk rock because it's the difference between contributing and alienating. I'm not even that upset about missing the show, it's OK. I'd much rather take time to get my head right than put myself in an environment where I could fuck up a good thing.

Each month BAND DRAMA will either be reviewing a universal issue that all bands face, or I'll be reviewing one of your band's issues. If you'd like a fresh perspective, advice, or just to vent in general (anonymously or not) reach out to banddramamrr@gmail.com. I've been in a lot of bands for the past sixteen years, which means that I've been in a lot of bands that have ended or failed. I'd like to think that I've grown from each, learned from each, and taken the time to reflect on each failure or success. I'm also still learning and experiencing and I always will be. So I want to share what I've learned, as well as learn from all y'all punks in bands too.



FUCK CHRISTMAS... AND OTHER HOLIDAY FAVORITES

Since this issue is coming out in early December, even though it's the January issue, I figured I'd get everyone in the holiday spirit. I'm a bah-humbug kind of guy, to be honest. Never mind that once Halloween is over, the Christmas commercials have started (in fact, some holiday promotions begin well before Halloween) and I know it's only a matter of time until all of those hoary holiday "classics" will be heard no matter where you go. Shopping at my local Market Basket supermarket is crazy enough, with the dodging of personnel stocking the shelves and old ladies blocking the aisle while deciding which brand of tomato sauce they're going to buy. But an endless parade of "White Christmas," "Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas," "Silent Night," "Winter Wonderland," (and who or what the fuck is Parson Brown?) etc. is enough to make me want to act like Michael Douglas in the *Falling Down* fast food restaurant scene. What's even worse is musical artists deciding they just have to do their own holiday album with brand new interpretations of, you guessed it, "White Christmas," "Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas," "Silent Night," or "Winter Wonderland" (once again, who the *fuck* is Parson Brown?). Just what the world needs.

Inevitably, punk bands feel the urge to put out holiday albums. As you can imagine, most of them are terrible. They boil down to punked-up run-throughs of so-called classics or forced-sounding, "haha, aren't we clever?" cover versions of punk songs with holiday-oriented lyrics. I've cut back on the holiday music on Sonic Overload in recent years because I really don't want to subject my listeners—or myself—to two hours of sleigh bells and saccharine sentiments. But there are some punk and other out-there holiday perennials that are quite enjoyable and, as a bonus, will probably annoy your normie friends and relatives.

Everyone probably knows FEAR's 44 second epic "Fuck Christmas" by now. The perfect middle finger to the holiday season. Of course, Lee Ving had to ruin it and record a straightforward reading of "Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas" a few years ago. I'll stick with the classic, thank you. And I realize this is the second column in a row that I've mentioned FEAR. That will be it for a while—I promise.

The '90s-era Boston punk band SHOWCASE SHOWDOWN had a knack for witty songs. Every year, they'd do a holiday show featuring a medley of punked-up Christmas songs and their vocalist Albert would usually come out wrapped in Christmas lights. They had their own holiday 7", "Merry Christmas, I Fucked Your Snowman" and "Ho-Ho-Ho Chi Minh." The first one is the pick-to-click as they used to say (who's they, you ask? I don't know. It's an old DJ term) that you'll want to sing around the roaring fire. And, yes, it's really about fucking a snowman.

SNAP-HER had a song called "I Hate Christmas" all about spitting on mistletoe, beating up Santa's elves and burning down the shopping malls. Sounds like my kind of Christmas. Good snotty three chord punk. You can find it on their *We're Snap-Her—and You're Fucked!!* EP. The CLAP's "Christmas In A Body Bag" is another blast of fast three-chord mayhem. You can find that on their 1999 7" *Songs For The Sophisticated*. Another short one is by Vermont punk legends the WARDS—"Santa's Cadillac." They were an '80s era band but definitely looked back towards the '77 era for their inspiration. ALAN MILMAN SECT'S "Punk Rock Christmas" actually is from '77 and it's a stompin' bit of KBD fodder. The 7" is a kind of rare, but there was a CD compilation of their stuff in the '90s, including their classic song "Stitches In My Head."

Then you have holiday songs that don't really sound like holiday songs except for mentioning Christmas but they'll still liven up your holiday get-togethers. DIDJITS "Under The Christmas Fish," from their *Hey Judester* album, stomps its way into your brain, riding a relentless, repetitive riff. The Didjits remain an underrated band, a hellbound tornado of wild punk rock'n'roll fury with a wise-assed sense of humor.

BASEMENT 5 were a mostly-Black UK band in the late '70s / early '80s. They had a RUTS-ish sound at times, blending loud guitars with supple rhythms and adding reggae here and there. There were dub-style recordings but their album *1965–1980* was pretty straightforward. "Last White Christmas" comes from there, a pounding, hard rocking song that has a whomping, mid-tempo rhythm.

If you want to clear the room, might I suggest "No Christmas For John Quays" from the FALL's *Live At The Witch Trials* album. There's a pun—say John Quays fast—as in "no Christmas for junkies." Mark E. Smith's lyrics are gloriously stream-of-consciousness

COLUMNS

and backed by a manic, gnashing arrangement. Christmas just isn't going to be the same with Mark E.. The FALL also did a short version of "Jingle Bell Rock," but you really don't need to hear that.

So Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, Happy Solstice, Happy Kwanzaa or have a nice day...

STICK THESE IN YOUR STOCKING...

Mark at Beach Impediment Records continues to unleash quality slabs of vinyl. BLOOD PRESSURE's *Surrounded* marks the return of one of the best hardcore bands in the US. Just as relentlessly raging as their *Need To Control* album. Fast and burning, with Adam Thomas' angry-as-fuck vocals and one blazer going straight into another. The execution is perfect and the anti-social attitude remains as in-your-face as ever. "Misanthropy," "Useless," "Hate"... you get the idea. "Exposed" is about people who act all politically righteous but use it as a front for sexual conquest. Suffering no fools. This is the real shit, accept no substitute.

Next is a vinyl pressing of STIGMATISM's 2017 demo. A two man studio project, stretched out to a five piece for live performances and the (guilty) parties are Marc Grillo (VÄGRA, Pleasure Industry, Olde Ghost) both drumming and bellowing the words of hate and Kevin "Spoiler" Alen (OMEGAS, PROXY) taking care of the string section. Hammering hardcore with a strong early AGNOSTIC FRONT influence, along with some boot-stomping passages. "Your Demise" and "Death Sentence" have a total *United Blood* vibe, although the production is a lot less primitive-sounding. No lyric sheet, but there's a strong anti-war message to "Bloodshed." Real mean-sounding.

Finally, LAMOUR—or L'AMOUR as it's spelled in the liner notes—were an early Richmond punk band who released one three song 7" in 1979. *Look To The Artist: 1978–1981* takes those three songs and appends it with demos that were recorded about a month before the 7" tracks and a side of live material from 1980. This wasn't really a KBD-sounding band. L'AMOUR's songs have more of a pub rock'n'roll sound and the demo songs have slightly more edge than their 7" counterparts. There's a snappy catchiness to "Sunglass Party." Still, this was more bar rock than punk. The live songs have them expanding the song lengths—three of them top the four minute mark—but there's not a lot of excitement nor grit. The album has its moments, but I wouldn't say this falls into the "necessary reissue" category. (PO Box 26348, Richmond, VA, 23260, beachimpedimentrecords.bigcartel.com)

Atomic Action Records dig into the archives for a pair of recent releases. It's been over three decades since VERBAL ASSAULT's *Trial* album came out on the short-lived Giant Records label and it's been out of print on vinyl for a long-ass time. This was the Newport, RI band's debut long-player (and their second 12"), VERBAL ASSAULT started as a pretty straight-forward, uptempo hardcore band inspired by 7 SECONDS and the like. By the time this record came out, they'd evolved into a more "mature," melodically-inclined band with longer, intricate compositions that were still capable of packing a punch, especially the lead-off title track, the best song they ever wrote. Chris Jones's emotive vocals were delivered in a MacKaye-ish tone and the band were certainly inspired by what was going on in DC in the mid-to-late '80s. They could also hold their own musically with any of those bands. It may not hit me same it did thirty years ago but it does still strike something of a chord. Given a good-sounding remix and packaged in a much better-looking cover.

KINGPIN were a band from Holliston, MA (about 30 miles southwest of Boston), and yours truly released their debut 7" *Holding Tomorrow* in 1991. After that, they recorded an EP that was originally supposed to be released on Redemption Records, but it sat in the can for over 25 years. They played heavy, melodic hardcore that took over part of the Boston area scene in the early '90s (see also: EYE FOR AN EYE, SAID AND DONE, THIRD DEGREE) and much of it hasn't held up particularly well. The four songs here show a lot of instrumental skill and finesse but it's the kind of hardcore that was far removed from any sort of punk influence. Instead, the songs are laborious and overwrought sounding. I hate to say it, but this is an era in Boston's hardcore history I'd kind of like to forget about. (Atomic Action, atomicaction.bandcamp.com)

Philly meets Madison (Wisconsin, that is) on a new split 7" by TRASH KNIFE and DUMB VISION. TRASH KNIFE continue to dish out scrappy, snotty and catchy punk with a trashy spirit (pun intended). DUMB VISION also have a tuneful bent, wrapped up in a buzzy guitar cocoon and it's not too saccharine-sounding although it's nothing mind-blowing, either. To be honest, I'll be listening to the Trash Knife side a lot more. (Kitschy Spirit, kitschyspirit.com)

PUBLIC ACID's *Easy Weapons* 12" provides a solid dose of burning, buzzing D-beat / raw punk. You know the drill—distortion on the guitars, thick basslines and held down with thumping drums. And it's not completely blown-out noise and the tempos are at a fast-but-not-too-fast clip. It's been done thousands of times already, it'll be done thousands more, but PUBLIC ACID have enough energy and rage to keep you listening. (1110 Lexington Ave., Greensboro, NC 27403, publicacid.bandcamp.com)

More than two decades in, VITAMIN X's debut album for Southern Lord, *Age of Paranoia*, sees the Amsterdam four piece continuing to bash out fast and furious hardcore punk with metallic touches. While there's plenty of speed and burn, the rock'n'roll fervor comes to fore a bit more than in the past, as Marc Emmerik dishes out an array of tasty guitar riffs and leads. The title track's intro is quite Iommi-esque before kicking into a vintage RAW POWER feel. Executed like a well-oiled machine at this point and always a fun excursion. (Southern Lord, www.southernlord.com)

The German duo MÜLLTÜTE's second album maintains their scrappy, stripped-down hardcore punk a la AMDI PETERSENS ARME, although there are other wrinkles and they get some help from a few friends on synth and vocals. Opening song "Halbschlaf" begins with a new wavish synth mixing in with the staccato attack. "Argnhgst" is definitely full of the angst mentioned in the lyrics, achieved with a jarring, sometimes atonal breakdown—that's as in brief blasts of free noise. The final two songs that follow that one incorporate a slight sense of melancholy into a fired-up framework, with some of the harshest vocals on the album. The simplicity is deceptive—there's plenty going on in here. (muetue@heartfirst.net)

SCHIACH's self-titled album comes with a bilingual (German and English) hymnal and it's a musical daily affirmation. More accurately, it's a protest against the "right and proper" that bores you, against a life populated by annoying, ignorant people. After all, SCHIACH means ugly or nasty. As for those hymns, you'll hear a gnarled post-punk concoction driven by jabbing guitar lines but with melodic underpinnings provided by throbbing, fluid bass lines. Echoes of WARSAW (JOY DIVISION in their early days) and SWELL MAPS at times, only with an angrier edge. After you're done listening, finish the Sudoku puzzle in the back of the booklet and please leave your donation on the way out. Bless you. Damn everyone else. (Phantom, www.phantom.tk)

Holy shit! SLOKS' *Holy Motor* album dishes out raw, dark, nasty, bloozy garage punk primitivism. Real fucking primitive. Guitar, drums and snarly, whooping vocals. SLOKS, who are from Italy, revel in a fuzzy, clattering attack, hammering away in repetitive fashion. The minute-long "Killer" is about as close to pop as they get, although the wailing vocals means it won't be in Top 40 rotation anytime soon. Nor any other song on this album. (Voodoo Rhythm, www.voodoorhythm.com)

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I received a phone call a few weeks ago from a friend of mine having car trouble. She had blown a tire and needed help changing it out for the spare. Thankfully, due to the excessive amount of touring that I have done, I have become at least somewhat handy when it comes to cars and other such things from having had just about every breakdown imaginable. Welcome one and all to the surely recurring column I like to call: "Tales from the Tow Truck."

I have been regularly touring since the turn of the century when at the time I was the youngest person in my band, I OBJECT. Being wide-eyed, overly enthusiastic, and often incredibly low on funds, I would almost always blindly agree to things and hope for the best. As a young bandmate I was most certainly a "say yes to everything" kinda guy. Nowadays, it is a rarity when I am not the oldest person in the band I regularly travel with. I like to think that I have learned from my many mistakes of the past, but I am still perhaps overly willing to do the idiotic if it will end up providing me a good story. Even as a seasoned vet with all these years of touring under my belt, I sometimes get lightly mocked about the beat up state of the crummy vehicles I choose to drive. The standard touring van these days seems to be Sprinters. I hate everything about Sprinters. I don't like driving them, I don't like not being able to look out the window when in the back, I don't like the tiny little lofts that are often built in the back to try to make there be a space to stretch out in, I don't like that when there are inevitably issues with them on the road that you are forced to find a Sprinter-specific mechanic to make the necessary repairs. I made the decision long ago that I would try to purchase neglected vehicles at a reasonable price and run them into the ground before scrapping them and moving on to the next. I used to have regular arguments with a good friend who also drove bands on tour. He had purchased a brand new Sprinter for the sole purpose of driving his own bands as well as taking paid driving gigs. He would mock the state of whatever current van I had and I would make fun of him for going into debt to buy the big windowless boxy sail of a Sprinter he owned. My final blow in the argument usually came by pointing out that my van was easily 1/35th as nice as his, which was the rough difference in price we paid for our respective touring vehicles.

As beat up as my recent handful of vans have been, they have been glorious vessels compared to some of the ones I was talked into while in my early years of touring. We used to spend a few hundred bucks maximum on a van, or a suburban, or an ambulance, neglect to have it checked out by someone remotely mechanically trained, and attempt to drive it on lengthy multiple week long tours. Needless to say, I've had more than my fair share of breakdowns. Hell, in a few instances I am probably pretty lucky to have escaped with my life.

During the rescue of my parking lot ridden friend, as I was getting to work on loosening the lug nuts on the flat tire of her hearse in the lot where she ended up, the first thing she asked me was whether I had AAA. She wanted to note that, if I did we could just have her car towed and not have to deal with getting it up and running ourselves. I had to tell her that I, along with the rest of my first real band's other members, am actually banned for life from having AAA or taking advantage of any of their roadside services. It didn't really occur to me what an outlandish statement that probably sounded like until I saw the reaction on her face. Clearly this required a bit of explanation. I have often stated that living in Western New York is one of the best places to live if you're playing in a touring band. While our cities aren't particularly big or cool by any means, we do have a very interesting location in terms of the ability to do short weekends of shows without any huge haul of driving. I would say there are probably a good dozen or so three to four day routes you can go out on without having any drives over six hours long and without repeating cities. So, in between longer tours, while my bandmates and I would be at home working our crummy jobs or doing medical studies to save up money to get back on the road, we were still able to go out most weekends and hit up a bunch of out of town shows somewhat nearby.

Combine reasonably short drives with already nearly broken down vans and surely it can be imagined just how often we ended up on the side of a highway going over our options of how we were going to get home. I'm not entirely sure when we came up with this loophole, but with all the members of our band having AAA Gold membership, we discovered something that was to make our touring experience a lot stranger. With that membership you used to get I think five free tows per year, each up to 100 miles in distance. What we started doing is we would break down and rather then figuring out how to get home we would continue making our way to the rest of our shows, 100 miles at a time. It's called "tow hopping." We would get out our atlas and figure out a location that was one hundred miles in the direction of our next gig and get picked up by a tow truck and dropped off there. If the gig that night was further than 100 miles from our breakdown location we would get dropped off by the tow truck, push the van up the street to a different location (because they did not allow a second tow to be used from the location one was just dropped off at) and call for another tow, claiming we had fixed the problem and a new one presented itself. I am not entirely sure how we got away with it as we would call and use far more than the regularly allotted five tows. We even started further abusing the system when we realized that if you broke down on the highway and had to call for a tow that if they went through a toll, you didn't have to pay it. We would drive on a highway until we were just under 100 miles from the venue, pull over, call for a tow pretending to be broken down, and have the tow truck take us through the toll and the rest of the way to the gig, avoiding paying tolls as well as saving the price of almost two hours worth of gas.

Unfortunately, I believe this is one of those glory days situations that isn't exactly possible anymore. I know it isn't for me at the very least. Once the company caught on to what we were doing, they started to deny our tow requests. I vividly remember actually needing a tow to get home from an ill-fated trip and our bassist on the phone screaming at a AAA employee asking for his address because without a tow we were going to have to come spend the night with this employee. When our following years service had expired they did not allow any of us to renew another. I have to imagine with all the time that has passed that they keep a tighter leash on people, not letting them use tows that they do not have available to them anymore. Having multiple members of the same band sharing the load we got away with it for quite some time, though looking back on it perhaps it wasn't worth it now that I am serving a lifetime ban from the services offered by AAA Roadside Assistance. I suppose there are some positives to come out of this though, or at least my broken down friend would probably think so since it has forced me to learn how to repair problems rather than scam tows.

Got a good highway scam? Always looking for more. Feel free to send suggestions to xFeral_Kidx@yahoo.com

This month's column is basically a book review of *We Are the Clash* by Mark Andersen and Ralph Heibutzki. If this is / was reviewed by someone else at MRR, you get to compare and contrast.

We Are The Clash is the latest book by noted punk historian and political activist Mark Andersen and co-authored with Ralph Heibutzki whom I know little about. I have known Mark Andersen since the mid-1980s when he showed up to the meetings of nascent punk activist group that he would help organize into the long-running Positive Force DC. Mark's book *Dance of Days* about the DC hardcore scene is probably the best book written about punk rock or hardcore in America. It helps greatly that Mark was involved in the scene and does not fall prey to many of the common traps of rock critics, journalists, and other shallow glory seekers and tourists who write about punk in superficial terms. When you read Mark's work, you can see the passion he has for the music and how it has motivated him and his activism throughout his life. Mark is a very devoted fan of the CLASH. Like a lot of people, including myself, the CLASH were his first exposure to punk rock from seeing them mentioned in mainstream music media. The story of the CLASH has been told in great detail by Markus Grey in his book *Last Gang in Town* and also by Danny Garcia in his film *The Rise and Fall of the Clash*. However, Grey completely dismisses the band's final two years, as do most journalists critics and fans. Garcia covers it in his film but not in this kind of depth.

This book turns the spotlight on those two years and the turmoil inside the band. The book follows the trajectory of the CLASH from the heady days of 1976 through their commercial success, artistic exploration, and the tension that eventually led to the firing of Mick Jones and Topper Headon. Many fans consider this to be the end of the CLASH and the following CLASH Mark II or Neo CLASH era to be a farce. However, these authors treat this band and era with deadly seriousness and use it to examine many of the conflicts and issues created by trying to balance punk idealism, political awareness, and big rock music business. But this is only part of the book. The other chunk of the book is kind of a "people's history" of the late 20th century from a progressive activist perspective. It details the rise of Reagan and Thatcher and their capitalist Revolution and how it dismantled the post-war consensus. They use examples such as the miners strike, interweaving their story with that of the CLASH. However, it is essentially a schizophrenic approach with two separate books in one. Although they overlap and create context, the authors tend to stretch it a bit to pull in and interlink all kinds of political events far beyond the world and era of the CLASH. For readers who lived through the '80s it will seem somewhat tedious, perhaps for younger fans it will do a lot to help set the context and give them a quick education on activism and progressive movements from the '80s to the present. This review primarily covers the part of the book about the CLASH.

The essential arc of the book is that, after firing Jones and Headon, Strummer pledges to take the CLASH back to their punk roots. He claimed he wanted to recapture the energy and spirit of the first LP. Strummer and Simenon recruited a new lineup, adding another guitarist so that Strummer could focus on vocal duties. This five-piece spent a year relentlessly touring trying to recapture the energy of the early days of the band. I personally saw this lineup in Washington DC in 1984. And although my older friends all said they were better in the '70s, I thought the performance was electrifying and it is one of the best non hardcore gigs I've ever been to. The CLASH vowed to make a new album that was going to go back to the roots and wrote a bunch of new songs. The end result of all this though is the wretched *Cut the Crap* LP. And much of the book is the story of how producers, music business, and misguided ambition derailed the idea of returning to punk roots into a virtually unlistenable album that is a mishmash of rock, and electronic beats.

Like his hero Woody Guthrie before him, and like Kurt Cobain after him, Strummer struggled with the burden of stardom. Especially since he was a socialist political activist who wanted to shake things up with his music. Strummer was weighed down by the fact that he and the CLASH's management team thought that the only way to achieve this was by signing to CBS and becoming a major label rock band. The authors are, I think, a bit to uncritically enthusiastic about the material on *Cut the Crap*. Part of their mission is to rehabilitate this record. This record sucks and was a huge letdown to all of the CLASH fans who had been told it was going to be a return to their roots after the poppy sounds of *Combat Rock* or the world music of *Sandinsta*. CLASH manager Bernie Rhodes had a vision of a new electronic punk music of the future with drum machines, samples, and mixed in bits of hip-hop and reggae. However, he lacked the creative genius of Mick Jones, and this record fell flat on its face. Instead of being revolutionary and new, it just sounds like crap. And honestly, no one would care about this record at all if it had been released by the BOOMTOWN RATS or some lesser band. I find it ironic that Mick Jones had the same vision of the future of music, trying to mix punk, funk, electronic etc with Big Audio Dynamite. Although mildly more successful, his vision also sounds incredibly dated. Meanwhile the first CLASH LP is still great. It is really tragic that Strummer failed to live up to his ambition and capture the energy of the live shows and go back to the punk roots and write great songs. It's possible that with different management and more determination the band could have gelled and made a great record. It is also possible that without Mick Jones this would never have worked. Just as Mick Jones post CLASH efforts never rose to greatness without Strummer. There has been much talk about the demos for this record and how it would have been great if Bernie Rhodes hadn't gotten involved. To that, I say balderdash, the demos are on Youtube and they aren't very good either. Mick Jones might have been able to improve this record, but removing Bernie Rhodes would only have made it a flat sounding rock record instead of a futuristic electro mishmash of the same songs.

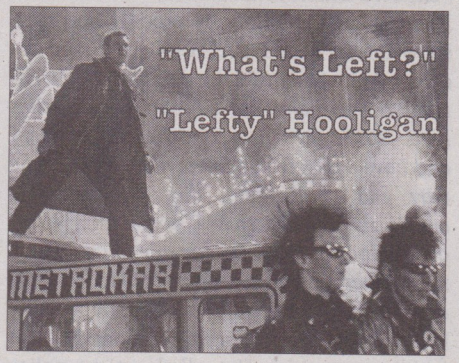
The most interesting part of this book is the CLASH is busking tour. Joe Strummer had started out in the pre-punk era playing acoustic guitar busking on the streets like his idol Woody Guthrie. After spending months in the studio with session musicians, drum machines, samples, managers, and producers the band decided to hitchhike around the north of England playing free acoustic shows and passing the hat for change to get to the next town. While some deride it is a publicity stunt it seems to me to be the last gasp of Joe's punk conscience rebelling against the music business world in which he had found himself immersed. The most amusing incident is when the CLASH decided to busk in front of a show by the ALARM, a pop rock band they derided for ripping off the Clash. As they were playing outside the venue, then anarcho punk band CHUMBAWAMBA approached and sprayed them with fake blood to protest the Clash selling out it's punk ideals. The irony here is that CHUMBAWAMBA was to sell out just a few years later and become alternative rock or rave or whatever.

The other part of this story I really enjoyed was Eddie King's graphics for this era of the CLASH. Let's face it, the cover art and t-shirts for *Cut the Crap* are the best part. I still have

my 1984 Clash tour shirt "Out of Control / Mohawk Revenge" and although it no longer fits, it's still really cool.

I would recommend this book to any serious CLASH fan and also to those interested in the complex trade offs of trying to balance social commentary and activism with music business collaboration.

Review over, I must make a few personal observations. For me, the CLASH are a very important band. I was too young to be enlightened in 1976, my initial exposure to the CLASH came from *Creem* magazine (Boy Howdy!) and the mainstream success of *Combat Rock*. But as I dug backwards into the catalog I discovered the first two LPs and these blew me away. This was my first exposure to real punk rock (as opposed to bands like ADAM AND THE ANTS, or BOW WOW WOW). I quickly got a cool CLASH iron-on applied to a grey and red ¾ sleeve jersey while on a family vacation to Myrtle Beach. When I heard the CLASH were touring with the WHO, I rushed out and bought tickets, but when the CLASH cancelled the DC gig I gave the tickets away to a classmate. Before I discovered hardcore, I thought those first two CLASH LPs were the heaviest, most intense music around, and they are still very special to me. When the CLASH "Mark 2" toured in 1984, I was in the front of the stage raging. I had busted the hood ornament off a Mercedes and wore it on the epaulette of my jacket. During the gig I took it off and threw it on stage, Simenon saw me throw it, picked it up, and buttoned it into the epaulette of his shirt. I thought that was really fucking cool. I wonder if he noticed the huge CRASS patch on my back, as that band were the ultimate CLASH haters, but I didn't give a fuck. I still loved "White Riot." I quickly outgrew the pop and world music sounds of *London Calling* and *Sandinista*, although there are good songs on those records, and I will admit to perking up a bit on the job site when "Rock the Casbah" gets its air time on the local "Classic Rock" radio station. Also, we can appreciate the CLASH for their unpatronizing embrace of reggae and hip-hop. That said, the CLASH were probably the most important band in the world in 1976, but were quickly made irrelevant by the punk subculture they helped champion. That is to say, after bands like CRASS and DISCHARGE, who needed a major label rock band and it's increasingly oblique social commentary? And the CLASH didn't exactly silence their critics on the left with "Train in Vain," touring with the Who or playing the US Festival. By this reckoning, chances of the CLASH, even with Mick Jones, returning to their roots and writing a great punk record, were a long shot at best. They had moved too far from their roots and been overtaken by the second wave of punk and the hardcore movement. So maybe take *Cut the Crap* off the shelf, admire the artwork and listen to a few songs to reassure yourself you aren't missing anything. Then go back to alternating between the US and UK pressings of the first LP.



I'm against it.
Groucho Marx as Professor Quincy Adams Wagstaff
"I'm Against It," *Horse Feathers*
I'm against it.
The Ramones, "I'm Against It," *Road to Ruin*

I'm against it.

Capitalism that is. I'm against capitalism because it prioritizes profit over human need, exploits workers, engenders economic instability through overproduction and underconsumption, promotes social inequalities, degrades human community, destroys the environment, and encourages short term thinking at the expense of long term planning. There is a vastly better alternative to capitalism in the form of socialism.

My antagonism toward capitalism is a standard, rational form of opposition. "A" is bad while "B" is good, so here is why I oppose "A." I'll call this vanilla opposition.

Then there's contrarianism. It's the opposition of that Beatles song "Hello Goodbye" the lyrics of which proclaim: *"You say 'Yes,' but I say 'No.'"* It's a reflexive, unconscious form of opposition. It's actually a very punk form of opposition. In *Anarchy Comics* #3, published in 1981, Paul Mavrides and Jay Kinney penned the comic "No Exit" about hardcore punk rocker and visceral anarchist Jean-Paul Sartre, Jr., who gets transported 3,000 years into the future when anarchism has finally prevailed and where "There's no more war, oppression, sexism, racism, ageism, shapeism, sizeism!" Needless to say, J-P doesn't react well. At one point he freaks and starts to "fuck shit up." J-P's future hosts admonish him: "Really J-P! There's no need for this alienated behavior!! Since all property belongs to everyone, you're only hurting yourself!!" To which J-P responds: "Yeah? Well, if it's all mine too, I can *wreck* it if I *want* to, right?"

Such is the essence of this form of opposition, which I'll call reactive opposition. *MRR* once had a columnist who specialized in this type of opposition and routinely played devil's advocate in the pages of the magazine. If Tim Yo or other *MRR* coordinators insisted there be no racism, sexism, or homophobia, this columnist would go out of his way to defend sex with children or call gay people "homos." I hung out with him a couple of times and whenever people reacted angrily to his antics a sly smile would cross his face. Ultimately, he was fired when his column was rejected for calling women who had survived sexual assault "cry babies" suffering from "survivoritis" in letting themselves remain victims. Ironically, he whined he was a victim of *MRR*'s anti-free speech PC attitude. In this era of Trump and Kavanaugh, he's on Facebook writing post-*MRR* columns in which he regularly defends Trump and the horrors of Trumpism. As a dutiful contrarian, of course.

Finally, there's what I call dark opposition. Dark opposition stems from the seductive charms of the transgressive. The English Puritan John Milton wrote an epic poem intended to exalt his Christian faith by retelling the Genesis story of the fall of man. Called *Paradise Lost*, its main problem was that the figure of Satan, as evil incarnate, came off as way too charismatic and downright noble. So attractive was Milton's portrait of the devil that *Paradise Lost* was a best seller in its day while his sequel of the story of that goody two-shoes Jesus, *Paradise Regained*, was a flop. Every modern rebel, whether adolescent or political, identifies with Satan when he declared "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven." I'll spend the rest of my time discussing dark opposition based on the appeal of transgression, or what in *Star Wars* lingo is called the "power of the dark side."

BBC-TV did a movie, *Longford*, about the 1960s moors murders and the English aristocrat and prison reformer who became involved with one of Britain's most notorious criminals, child-killer Myra Hindley. Hindley gets one of the film's better lines when her character says "Evil can be a spiritual experience too." The draw of transgressive evil is never to be underestimated. Numerous books have been written on the subject and several youthful subcultures have actively embraced the dark side of things, the most prominent being Goth.

But the appeal of the left-hand path goes back all the way to Vedic *Vāmācāra* practice and Tantrism which eventually entered

Western spirituality through Madame Blavatsky, Theosophy, and Aleister Crowley. The latter couched it in terms of the occult and ceremonial magic where the right-hand path equated to benevolent white magic while the left-hand path meant malevolent black magic. Magick if you will. This distinction is common with occultists, among them parafascist Julius Evola who emphasized that those pursuing the right-hand path worked selflessly for the glorification of the divine while those on the left-hand path worked egocentrically for the glorification of the self. After the second World War, esoteric Nazism and Hitler worship emerged in various forms of *völkisch* spirituality in neo-*völkisch* movements, pioneered by such individuals as Savitri Devi, Robert Charroux, and Miguel Serrano. This is paralleled in the revival of anti-modern elements of tribalism, paganism, Traditionalism, and mysticism in everything from right wing politics (Alain de Benoist's *Nouvelle Droite*) to music (industrial, black metal, neo-folk), terms often preceded with the combining form neo- (as in neo-tribal, neo-pagan, etc.) This is part of an opposition to modernism, of a revolt against the modern world.

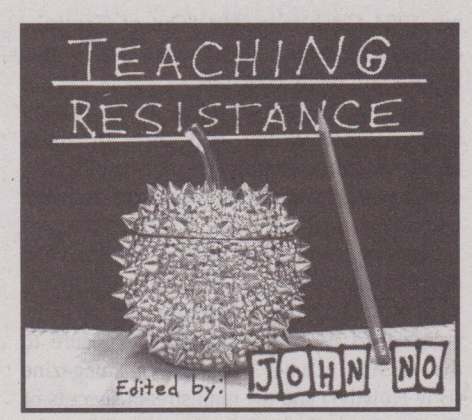
Rarely has this amounted to a conscious embrace of the power of evil however. More often, and especially among the young, this has meant flirting with the devil, being naughty, getting an adrenaline rush, emotional thrill, or sexual charge from teasing the dark side. Sometimes it's conveyed as a conscious provocation, the deliberate use of highly charged language and symbols to outrage those who are invariably labeled "squares." This is the calculated method of musicians and bands like BOYD RICE and DEATH IN JUNE in the industrial and neo-folk genres who dress fash and talk fash but never actually claim fascism as an up front affiliation. In the end, a small percentage consider their embrace of the left-hand and the right-wing a positive good. That's the stance of most involved in the ultranationalist Patriot movement because isn't patriotism a good thing after all? Robert Anton LaVey defined his Satanism as a Nietzschean *übermensch* philosophy in opposition to the prevailing Christian herd mentality of society at large. And the virulently anti-semitic, Hitler-worshipping murderers of the neo-nazi Atomwaffen Division death squad believe that a new, expanded Holocaust—in which not just Jews and Leftists, but the immoral, degenerate and weak will be exterminated—is a positive, healthy social good.

These diehard characters are downright proud of their badass transgressive Nazi selves, unlike assclown Gavin McInnes and his ilk on the ultra-right who, when called out for throwing a Roman salute or reveling in racial slurs, disguise their dark shit with their disingenuous reactive crap. "Can't you take a joke?" is their common refrain. Occasionally those who are in dark opposition are actively aided by those who are in reactive opposition. The Elbo Room, a long-standing San Francisco dive bar, recently closed its doors due to lease / landlord issues. In December, 2015, the Elbo Room gained notoriety by proudly hosting a show for the band DEATH IN JUNE and co-owner Matt Shapiro said: *DEATH IN JUNE is not a Nazi band, nor a group that preaches hate. While they use controversial imagery and have songs with subject matter that some may find challenging, they are definitely not Nazis, nor hateful. I come from many generations of Jews. Do you think I could look my mother in the eye after booking a Nazi act?* Shapiro wasn't dissembling, he actually believes DIJ aren't fascist, let alone Nazi or white supremacist. He called out the police against protesters he falsely claimed were wielding knives. "These folks were menacing and looking for trouble." We have to take Shapiro's word that DIJ are not fascist and that protesters threatened violence in this prime example of reactive opposition. Had it been the former *MRR* columnist mentioned above, he would have defended DIJ *because* they are fascists, in deference to his free speech absolutism. How punk.

Not.

Luis Buñuel once said: "Sex without sin is like an egg without salt," implying a measured application of transgression to life. I'll be the first to admit my vanilla opposition is neither aggro enough nor sexy enough for most rebels-in-waiting. Yet reactive opposition and dark opposition are so fraught with problems, I've barely scratched the surface here. I'll readily admit having started out in reactive opposition in my youth and I'm sure some would argue that my present vanilla opposition is a sorry climb down from those heady days. But I'm quite proud never to have entertained any long-lasting dark oppositional tendencies. Now that Kavanaugh has been confirmed to the Supreme Court, I can sincerely call that brief exhibit a "youthful indiscretion."

PERSONAL PROPAGANDA: You can download free EPUB, MOBI, PDF, and DOCX files of my latest cyberpunk mystery story "The Death of David Pickett" at www.62milepress.com/the-death-of-david-pickett. To find links to my blogs, websites, Facebook, and Instagram, visit my social media aggregator at www.gamatiasz.com. You can purchase copies of my near-future science fiction thriller "1% Free" through either site.



To punks of the smart, socially-conscious persuasion, Alice Bag is about as dynamic an icon as you will find. A first-generation Chicana from Los Angeles, at age eight Alice began writing and performing music in English and Spanish; this need for wild expression eventually developed into her work as singer for the legendary, innovative punk band the BAGS (1977–1981). In the mid-'80s, Alice's political activism and desire to enact positive change in her community eventually led her down the path towards teaching; a career she pursued for decades. All the while, she has remained an active punk musician (in CHOLITA!, STAY AT HOME BOMB, ALICE BAG BAND, and other projects), became a mother, and has written the acclaimed books Violence Girl *and* Pipe Bomb For the Soul.

In part one of this two-part interview, Alice talks about the intersections with punk and teaching, being a radical in the early SoCal punk scene, getting into teaching as a radical Latinx woman, and the experiences she had doing volunteer work for the Sandinista educational system in revolutionary Nicaragua in the mid-'80s. Part two will be next month! You will also be able to read the entire unabridged interview in the upcoming "Teaching Resistance" book, available in Fall 2019 on PM Press!

Interviewer: John No

MRR: In your recent book "Pipe Bomb For the Soul," you talk about falling in love with teaching while working part-time as a teacher's aide in college—even though your original vision was to become a lawyer. Where and who did you want to teach? Did the ideals and culture of punk, which you helped to create as an openly radical woman of color, influence your decision to become a teacher? Or was it more from other factors in your life, such as your upbringing as the child of immigrants? Or is it a mix of all of the above?

I thought I would be a good lawyer because I wanted to make positive change in my community and because I enjoy the art of argument. Not destructive, name-calling type of arguments but honest and thoughtful discussion. As I was pondering which law school to attend, I landed a part-time job as a

teacher's aide, I was put in charge of working with the non-English speaking students. It was such a gift, to be able to teach kids who were in a situation similar to the one I'd been in (starting school without knowing the language of instruction). I felt a lot of personal satisfaction in being able to provide them with the type of learning experience that I wished I'd had. Teaching was like a salve over a wound that hadn't fully healed.

MRR: When did you get your own classroom?
I started teaching in 1984. I was hired while I was finishing up my student teaching through USC.

MRR: When you started teaching, were you still active in the Los Angeles punk and radical art community? If so, how did those worlds interact and collide, and how did they influence each other?
I was still playing music, but when I started teaching, I wasn't living in the thick of it, I wasn't completely immersed in the scene the way I had been when I was younger. By the time I became a teacher, I was working full time, putting myself through college, usually attending band rehearsals midweek and playing concerts on weekends.

MRR: Were you open about being a teacher to other punks in the scene, and / or open about being a musician / radical / punk to other teachers / admins / students at your work? If so, how did other musicians and artists during this period of punk react to your status as a teacher, and other teachers / students / admins react to you being a radical punk artist?
I was open about being a teacher to my musician friends and they were all supportive but I did not share my musical alter ego with the PTA. I really wanted to keep my two lives separate and I sometimes worried that my appearance would scare or intimidate the parents of my students so I had a sort of teacher costume, I dressed up like what I thought a teacher should look like. I enjoyed playing dress up and I think my professional presentation helped parents feel like their children were in good hands. The punk side of me can be a little scary. There were hints that I wasn't completely normal, I used to wear a button on my jacket with the slogan "Question Authority," and sometimes there were streaks of Manic Panic or Crazy Colour in my hair, but I never wore spikes, ripped fishnets or black leather at school, so my appearance in the classroom wasn't punk, but my attitude always was.

MRR: In your book *Violence Girl*, you are very frank about a lot of the political dynamics, divergences of opinion, and sometimes reactionary or racist / sexist attitudes from some people within the early SoCal punk scene. Do you see punk as an implicitly radical subculture? How so or why not? Has it changed over time in this regard?
I guess it depends on how we define the word "radical." I think punk is meant to challenge the status quo. It's about rebellion but it's not about dichotomies, or divisions, or working within traditional political constructs. Punk is about expressing ideas, finding communities that can engage in dialogue and working together towards making positive change. In other words, punk is about empowerment and autonomy, rather than left or right wing ideologies and the punks that I know are fiercely independent in their ways of thinking. Sometimes they drop sparkling words of wisdom and other times it's pure crap.

MRR: You've written a few songs about teaching in your recent projects (ie the song "Programmed"), yes? Tell us about some of those. Also, Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has been profoundly influential to many teachers. Tell us how it affected you, and what circumstances in your life, context and personal experiences created greater resonance and connection with this foundationally radical work.
"Programmed" was inspired by Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of The Oppressed* and by my time volunteering in post-revolutionary Nicaragua, just a few years after the Sandinistas took power.
When I first started teaching, I was working with an emergency credential, which meant that I still had to take a few classes beyond my BA. In one of those classes, I was assigned the book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The author, Paulo Freire, describes a type of education that I recognized, the type that I had experienced as a child. Freire called it the "Banking Method": it regards children as empty vessels to be filled. When the "Banking Method" is used, students are treated as receptacles for the values of the dominant class. The practice dehumanizes and disempowers children, whose culture, experience, language and ideas are subjugated in order to indoctrinate the students with the ideology of those in power. It fails to teach critical thinking skills; it does not teach the value of dialog. I used to think that Freire referred to it as the Banking Method solely because teachers were expected to make deposits of information into their students but I think I might have missed another way in which this sort of teaching resembles banking. The practice creates a culture of apathy, ignorance, and compliance, further enriching those in power and reinforcing the status quo.

MRR: In *Pipe Bomb For the Soul*, something very interesting that you describe was the classrooms in rural Nicaragua where you worked—Escuela NICA being one—where there were a lot of dynamics at play that might be unfamiliar to teachers in wealthy industrialized states. In the Escuela NICA classroom, small children, adult farmers, women with babies, and more all learned the same lessons together, in a very discussion-oriented learning environment. Were the small groups and discussion partners mixed in age, gender, profession, etc? How did these dynamics play out in the small groups, partners, and class discussions? How did the teacher monitor these discussions?
The literacy classes were not run by the NICA school. The NICA school focused on helping to find volunteering opportunities for internationalists. The NICA school was also used as a community meeting space. I volunteered in literacy classes and elementary school. The literacy classes were different from the regular elementary or secondary school classes, they were held at different times of day or night and sometimes on weekends. The Sandinistas hoped to eradicate illiteracy and they consulted Freire in developing their literacy campaigns. In the literacy classes, the students varied in age, occupation, gender, background. It's interesting that you ask me this question about the class discussions because it was an area that really required people to re-educate themselves and adhere to respectful guidelines for constructive dialogue. Sometimes there were disagreements, but people actually worked on being attentive and respectful. It definitely took effort, and it was evident that people considered this type of personal growth as an extension of the revolution. The teacher took on the role of facilitator, offering guidance if a discussion became heated. The goal was not consensus but rather a respectful exchange of ideas.

MRR: Who came to the classroom with different life experiences?
The differences I observed were mostly between the people who worked in the small towns and those who were from more remote areas in the countryside. Their way of life, their connection to the earth, their knowledge of business, access to medicine, to books, to plumbing, all of these created a distinction between, say, a farmer and a store clerk. The cool thing about the literacy campaigns is that they would enlist the help of teen brigadistas who would volunteer to go teach literacy to the campesinos who lived in more secluded or distant places. So, the goal was not just to address the problem of illiteracy, but to unite Nicaraguans from different backgrounds and include those who might have otherwise been politically disenfranchised, the farmers who were traditionally voiceless in government. It also illustrates how teenage students became teacher / students and how the campesinos became students who were also teaching the teacher about their culture. This reminds me so much of punk rock where the lines between audience and performers blur, where everyone is involved in creating a mutually satisfying, enriching experience...but I digress.

MRR: A good deal of *Pipe Bomb For the Soul* has to do with reassessment and questioning your own internal biases and assumptions. For example, when you were processing your perception of Sandinista Commandante Gladys Baez, you had to reconcile her powerful, indigenous, womanly identity with your subconscious perception that the role of military commander is intrinsically masculine / male. After gaining a greater understanding

COLUMNS

of the huge role played by women in the Sandinista revolution by talking with her military comrade (and your host) Francie, you bring it around to a powerful (and dark and funny) imagining of Gladys's torture at the hands of the right-wing Somoza regime, where she is interrupted mid-questioning by her husband and children who are complaining about their cold tortillas—to which Gladys replies "Heat your own damn tortillas! Can't you see I'm busy?!" This sort of honest accounting of your reflections and personal assessments, for which you also developed an icon system in the beginning of the book, provides a really useful modeling tool for teachers reading the book as far as methods for their own practice. How did you come to decide on this method for the book, and what are some other ways you see the book as a teaching tool for teachers or, really, anyone who wishes to engage in self-critique?

[laughter] When I decided to share my journal with the public, I knew that I wanted to leave my original voice, which is young, innocent, privileged and quite naïve, but I also wanted to be able to add historical details as well as commentary with the benefit of hindsight, offering a more mature assessment of my experiences. Naturally, these were missing from the original journal, so I modeled *Pipe Bomb For the Soul* after the "For Dummies" series, which allows for lots of little side notes that don't interrupt the narrative but expand or enhance it.

MRR: Was this approach to the book, and the way you keep the language accessible, influenced by the methods of the school? Was it influenced by the way that you approach and perceive punk culture / music / art? If so, in what ways? How are these things similar and how are they different?

Some of my methods were influenced by my experiences in Nicaragua but before I started teaching, I was a Philosophy major in college and I'm sure I was influenced by the Socratic Method. I suppose punk also had some influence in my methods, as punk is all about questioning and challenging authority. I think it worked the other way around, too—teaching influenced my punk. Teaching is a very performative profession; you have to be engaging to be a successful teacher. You have to know how to adapt to the needs of your students. You need to build a safe space where people feel like they can be themselves. I think engaging the audience, creating a safe community and being able to adapt to different situations is also important in punk.

MRR: Another interesting topic / subcurrent in the book has to do with the incongruities between revolutionary ideals and the development of revolutionary institutions following a revolutionary seizure of power (even if conflict is ongoing), and clearly education plays a strong role in literally teaching resistance and revolutionary history. Prime examples were the sample topic sentence that was posted on the first day you were in the classroom, "La reforma agraria la recupera la produccion de la tierra para el pueblo" ("Agrarain reform recovers the land for the use of the people"), the fact that the institutional revolution party FSLN was mentioned almost-exclusively in textbooks when discussing political parties, and prisoners were given greater levels of autonomy upon achieving literacy goals yet were fearful of criticizing the Sandinista government. Looking back at your reflections in the book today (most of it is from diary entries in 1986), and the convoluted history of Nicaragua since then, what are your current thoughts and feelings with regard to the cross-currents within this complex, grey area of resistance, education, institutional revolution, and elements of authoritarianism?

What is institutional revolution? It doesn't make sense to me. Can there be benevolent authoritarianism or a benevolent dictator? I don't think so. Any institution that finds its way around the autonomous will of the people can be neither revolutionary nor benevolent. It makes me sad to know that the spirit of revolution, reinvention and autonomy that I witnessed in 1986 is now withering in Nicaragua.

[Part II in the next issue of MRR]

The Teaching Resistance column is designed to provide a platform for radical, subversive teachers / educators to share their ideas and draw attention to important issues around education, particularly compulsory- and community-based education. If you are a teacher (anywhere in the world) for students of primary or secondary school ages (K-12), Community Colleges, or alternative learning arrangements such as collectivist free schools, and you want to submit an idea for a column, please write an email to teachingresistance@gmail.com —John No, Teaching Resistance editor

Last month was too hectic for me to get my shit together enough to write a column! Everything feels pretty wild over here at *MRR*, full of change and transformation. As you know, we sadly said goodbye to one of our Content Coordinators, Joan. We've been accepting applications for our next coordinator to work alongside Miranda and the rest of us to shape this magazine into something that best reflects what's happening in punk scenes worldwide.

While the crew temporarily dropping down to only one Content Coordinator has been a stressful and work-heavy time, the turnover invites an energy of new possibility. We're questioning a lot of our practices to better distribute power and workload, and we're working toward putting structure and policy in place to form systems that better transfer knowledge to new people. This kind of reorganization of infrastructure is the sort of giant task that's really exciting to me, honestly. I've been so happy to be having coordinator meetings and problem-solving as a group. And in a group that's been running a magazine for so long with so little formal structure, it feels like a blank slate to start from. How do we want to make decisions? How do we want to deal with conflict? Do we want to create policy that uplifts power dynamics that don't feel good, or do we want to deconstruct those dynamics and develop policy that empowers each other to support the group's needs? We're trying our best to be transparent about these conversations with the candidates for Content Coordinator, since coming into an organization during a transitional time can be confusing. I hope whoever we hire is excited by the possibilities of where this group can go with intention and effort.

Over the past month or so, the part of the magazine that I've been thinking a lot about is the reviews section. As of right now, I don't do record or demo reviews for a few reasons... I don't really have the time, but I also don't feel confident in my ability to write about any kind of music, let alone punk. Honestly, I've never felt less confident in my knowledge about anything punk-related since when I started working here. I'm not sure why that is, and I've been trying to figure out why that is. I've been very committed to being involved in punk scenes since I was an early teen. What about *Maximum* has me questioning my ability to talk and write about punk so much?? The legacy of the magazine feels like an older sibling who I love to hate, hate to love; someone I really want to like and accept me, but can never seem to fully trust their intentions.

Just the other day, I was flipping through an old *MRR*, and it happened to be the one in which one of the PEEPLE WATCHIN' reviews was in. PEEPLE WATCHIN' was a REPLACEMENTS and BENT OUTTA SHAPE worship pop punk band I played guitar in with my friends Sadie, Jake, and Mambo back in Boston, around the years 2011–2014. It fucking rocked. I threw the tape of *Somethin' To Tell Ya* on the other day as I was rolling up a few hundred repressed

MRR shirts. I totally forgot how fast that band was! It's probably the fastest band I've ever played in. Fuck, I miss it! Anyway, I came across the review of the record, and I shit you not, it calls PEEPLE WATCHIN' folk punk. What?! The?! Fuck?! Which fucking jaded asshole reviewer called this fast, solo-ripping, RANCID bass lines-slapping queer pop punk band folk punk? Who even assigned the record to that reviewer and thought they would be the appropriate person to write about that style of punk music? That issue was the last MRR I read for years. I remember flipping it off and talking shit for a few weeks... but of course I saved it to remember the time my band was reviewed, even if the review was bad.

All any of us ever want is a positive review in *Maximum Rocknroll*. This is the highest platform of media recognition that those of us committed to remaining underground get. I didn't know what the make-up or structure of people involved at *MRR* was—growing up in New England, San Francisco seems so far away it might as well be fictional. I assumed that everyone working on the magazine spoke one unified voice, and that voice was calling my band folk punk and fuck them all. I imagine I'm not alone in feeling like my band got an unfairly bad or dismissive review in this magazine either. I'm picturing a sort of "How many of you have been personally victimized by Regina George" audience of hands going up. And how many of you also gave up on *MRR* because of it?

Fast forward to now, November 2018, five years after the bad PEEPLE WATCHIN' review: I have entered the belly of the beast. I literally live inside the punk institution that I turned my back on. I listen to the *Somethin' To Tell Ya* tape in the kitchen and feel like the walls are rolling their eyes and laughing at me. I'm joking, but only like half-joking. I now understand that this group of people is completely amorphous, the voice of press is not united, and as far as I can tell, the person who wrote that review isn't even around anymore. There are lots of people involved in making intentional decisions about how reviews, interviews, and features are processed and taken care of. And, like I said earlier, we're regularly trying to break down power dynamics and assess the structures in place. However! My opinion is that the secret source of unaddressed power lies in the record reviewers, the people who are giving status, validation, and credibility to up and coming punk bands.

Let's talk about who reviews records here. There are currently between 22 and 24 reviewers. One handful aren't men, fewer than that aren't white, and most are over 35 years old. That means we have mostly white middle-aged cis-men reviewing the majority of the records that come in. Bands made up of people of all kinds of identities from all over the world must put their trust in that these old white guys will take their music seriously, that their record will be assigned to the reviewer who can best write about that genre, and that the reviewer will sit down on a good day and listen with open ears to the art that they've vulnerably created and sent in to *Maximum Rocknroll*. It's an incredible responsibility put on the record assigners and the reviewers. Life coordinating *MRR* is chaotic, and I do believe that the assigners take assigning seriously, but sometimes tasks get completed in a rush and some things get overlooked. Mistakes get made around here, obviously. (That's me insisting that it was a mistake to assign the PEEPLE WATCHIN' record to someone who would listen to it and dismiss it as folk punk.)

Think about the overworked, depressed-but-bright-eyed 21-year-old me flipping through *MRR* at Newbury Comics on my lunch break in Harvard Square, looking desperately for reviews of my and my friends' bands. Does this experience sound familiar? So rarely did I read the interviews or columns. So rarely did I even buy the magazine. I just wanted some acknowledgement in print that me and my scene mattered in a bigger context of worldwide punk. To see bands I was in, like PARASOL or DISIPLINE or FLEABITE, get a review that felt like the institution of *Maximum Rocknroll* was listening and understanding where we were coming from—even if the review itself wasn't so flattering—made me feel like at least I had this older sibling looking after me. But literally one reviewer having the misguided audacity to call my pop punk band folk punk made me throw a little sibling tantrum and stubbornly cross my arms at them for years. Do you see the point I'm trying to make by exaggerating this situation? The point is that it's in the hands of *MRR*'s record reviewers to make or break the confidence of a young punk just trying to make space for themself in the worldwide DIY scene.

I'm not trying to say that *Maximum* doesn't have reviewers who care about their reviews, because we do. I am trying to make a point that the reviews can be considered more visible and powerful than what gets put on the front cover. I hardly remember what the PEEPLE WATCHIN' interview said, but I'll always remember that review. This column is sort of a plea to our current record reviewers: Are you tired? How many years have you been writing reviews? Have you considered apprenticing a young punk into a reviewer seat? Have you thought about taking a step back and taking on a less visible, less powerful role at the magazine? Have you thought about how the overwhelming majority demographic of reviewers might make submitting an album for review intimidating? Have you considered that a band's message might not be for you, and maybe you're not the appropriate person to write a review about it?

Furthermore, to everyone else working with me on *Maximum Rocknroll*: what the fuck even is punk music, and who do we think we are to define it as we do? I recently made poll on *MRR*'s Instagram page asking for our followers to reply with their parameters for what is and isn't punk music. People around here love to try to define it, but can they really? The best answer I saw to that poll is that "punk is what punks do." None of the hundred-or-so responses we got gave any real musical parameters to how someone can say what should and shouldn't be considered punk. Even today, at the compound, some older record reviewers, younger shitworkers, and I had a rather heated (but riveting) discussion (argument?) about this exact topic. As of right now, our only rule as to what we review is that a band's music must not be distributed by a major label, and it must have drums and vocals. Distribution makes sense to me—we're a DIY punk magazine, the point is we're subverting the music industry by creating our own media. But drums and vocals? *Maybe* that made sense in the climate of underground music in 1982, but does it now? By remaining on some weird exclusive punk theory, is the magazine just further isolating itself from how punk's meaning has evolved over the last 35 years? If punks worldwide (including me) don't feel punk enough to be involved in this magazine, is this magazine really a reflection of what's happening in punk in 2018?

Stay tuned for next month's column that will dive further into the background of the discussion had at the compound today about what is and isn't punk music, and analyze people's answers to my Instagram question. I don't believe that I know the answer to what punk is, and my argument is that there is no way to define it musically (and thus, *MRR* should stop trying). Punk is what punks do. Write in your thoughts please!!

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GIVE 'EM HELL

CIVILISATION RECORDS/THREAT FROM THE PAST

CIVILISATION RECORDS (CR 038)
NEUROOT (NL) "OBUY AND DIE" LP
NEW ALBUM OF THIS DUTCH
HARDCORE PUNK LEGEND

CIVILISATION RECORDS (CR 039)
CHAOSBRINGER (RUS)
"TURN INTO RUINS" LP
THE RUSSIAN ANSWER TO BOLT THROWER.
BRUTAL OLD SCHOOL DEATH METAL

STILL HOT: THE BRISTLES / RÖVSVETT SPLIT EP,
RÖVSVETT "BLY, SKROT & HAGEL" EP AND MORE !!!

THREAT FROM THE PAST (THREAT 008)
THE FIEND (UK) "STAND ALONE" EP
RE-ISSUE OF THIS CLASSIC D-BEAT PUNK EP
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STILL HOT (PARTLY LOW STOCK): G-ANX "FLASHBACKS" 2LP,
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UPSET NOISE / WARFARE? SPLIT EP

UPCOMING RELEASES: FEBRUARY 2019
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LATER: ASOCIAL "RELIGION SUCKS" PICTURE EP,
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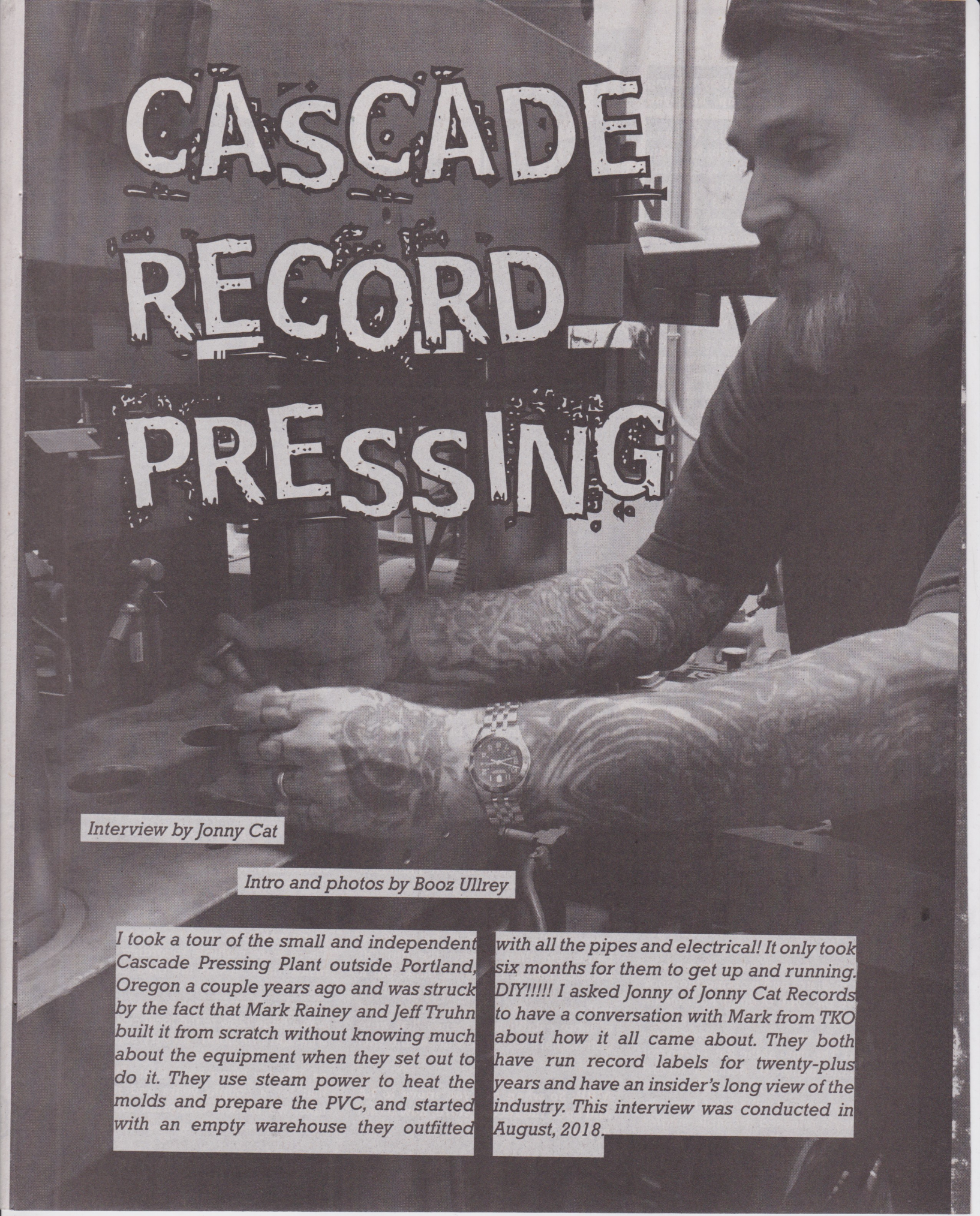
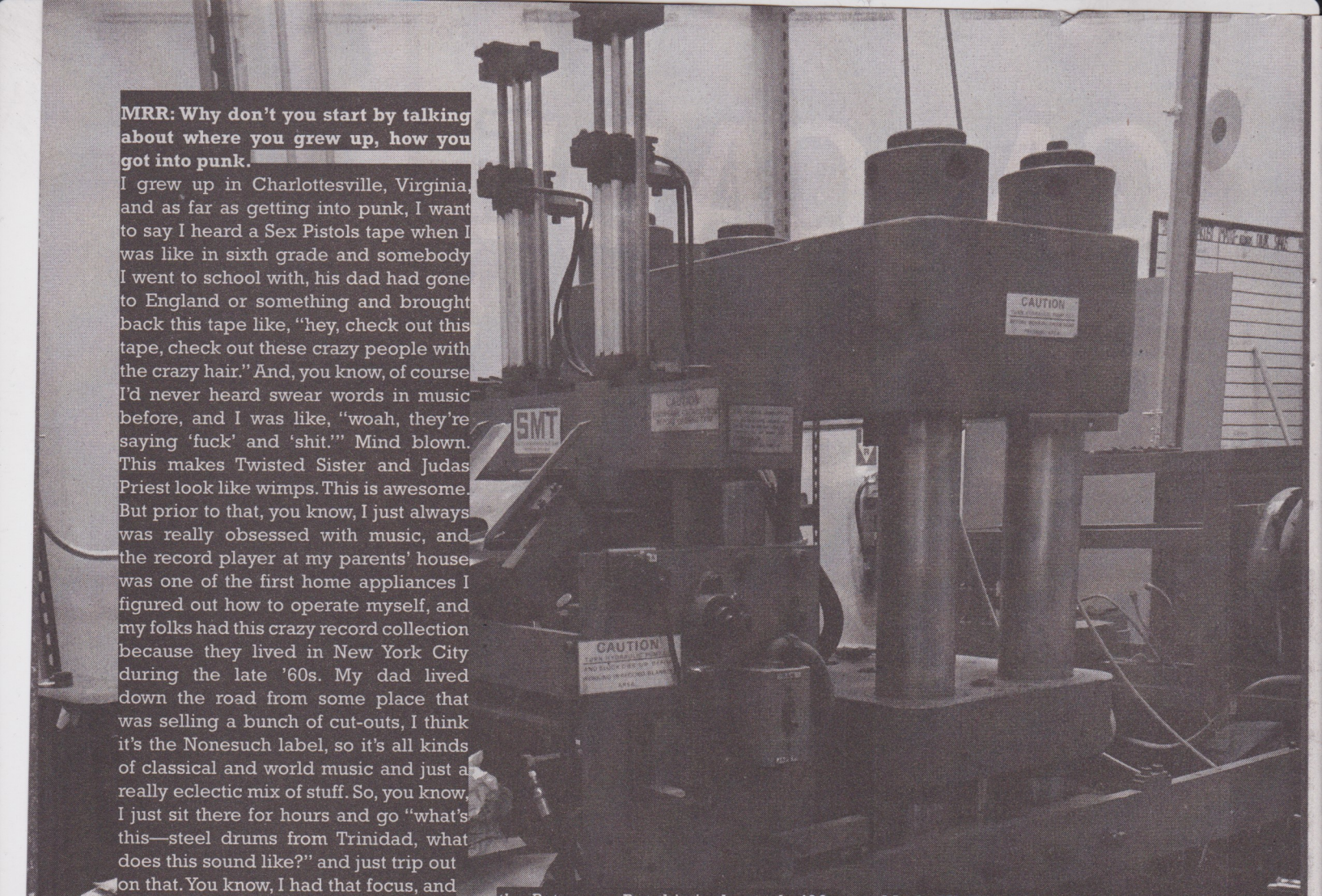


Interview by Jonny Cat

Intro and photos by Booz Ullrey

I took a tour of the small and independent Cascade Pressing Plant outside Portland, Oregon a couple years ago and was struck by the fact that Mark Rainey and Jeff Truhn built it from scratch without knowing much about the equipment when they set out to do it. They use steam power to heat the molds and prepare the PVC, and started with an empty warehouse they outfitted with all the pipes and electrical! It only took six months for them to get up and running. DIY!!!!! I asked Jonny of Jonny Cat Records to have a conversation with Mark from TKO about how it all came about. They both have run record labels for twenty-plus years and have an insider's long view of the industry. This interview was conducted in August, 2018.



MRR: Why don't you start by talking about where you grew up, how you got into punk.

I grew up in Charlottesville, Virginia, and as far as getting into punk, I want to say I heard a Sex Pistols tape when I was like in sixth grade and somebody I went to school with, his dad had gone to England or something and brought back this tape like, "hey, check out this tape, check out these crazy people with the crazy hair." And, you know, of course I'd never heard swear words in music before, and I was like, "woah, they're saying 'fuck' and 'shit.'" Mind blown. This makes Twisted Sister and Judas Priest look like wimps. This is awesome. But prior to that, you know, I just always was really obsessed with music, and the record player at my parents' house was one of the first home appliances I figured out how to operate myself, and my folks had this crazy record collection because they lived in New York City during the late '60s. My dad lived down the road from some place that was selling a bunch of cut-outs, I think it's the Nonesuch label, so it's all kinds of classical and world music and just a really eclectic mix of stuff. So, you know, I just sit there for hours and go "what's this—steel drums from Trinidad, what does this sound like?" and just trip out on that. You know, I had that focus, and it was just sort of a matter of time for a genre to pop up and be like, "oh yeah, this is my thing."

MRR: Where did you go from there; what happens next for you?

Well, you know, just a lot of the typical young adult moronic stuff. I ended up in my early twenties going to school in Boston and working at the Rat, sort of the last years of the Rat in Boston. At the same time, I had another job working at Rounder Records in Cambridge, which is an American folk roots label, pretty well-established. So for the brief time I was in Boston, I got exposed to the music business. We're talking like bottom rung, warehouse picker to distro and working the door at a dive bar type of thing. But I mean, from there, forget it. Forget college or trying to be square or whatever, I was hooked. The time at the Rat, I even got the whole notion of doing a record label from how that bar in the '70s had had its own label called Rat Records, and they'd released a couple singles by the Nervous Eaters and a *Live at the Rat* comp. But this is the early '90s, they were doing this event called the Punk Olympics, and the guy who was booking those shows and also head of security, he wanted to bring the label back and do like double live 7" of all the bands playing from those shows. It never materialized, but just the discussions around that kind of gave me the idea for doing a label, and I think it was just a matter of kicking that idea around for a year, a year-and-a-half, and finding myself in San Francisco right when there was a group of bands starting to get together and play that they didn't really fit in with, like they were a little too hard to be Lookout! bands but they weren't the Rip Off Records bands. It was all punk, but it was sort of a strain that was happening in the city that was outside of these kind of more established scenes that were going. That's sort of how the whole TKO thing came together.

MRR: So when did you move to LA and open the record store, how'd that happen?

Mark: Well, I guess the time between there, people jokingly call TKO: The Wilderness Years. That's when, we had four or five years in San Francisco and, as local scenes do, things had kind of peaked and then there was a decline. Part of what was going on in San Francisco at the time was the first big dot com boom, and then the decline and then the second one was coming, and a lot of people I was friends with, a lot of people that were a part of this community, were displaced. There was this massive band practice complex that was in Hunters Point. I don't know how many bands practiced there. The place was huge, it was multiple stories. There were multiple recording studios inside there. It was the great resource for music in the city, and it got sold and gutted and filled with servers, so that was a huge blow to the local culture. My wife and I decided "let's try something else, San Francisco is not really for us, let's try living back East." We tried that for a couple years and it didn't take, we missed California too much, so we moved back in 2004 and I was

in Orange County. A big part of why I chose to go there was again a center of five or six bands that I was working with with the label that were all based out of there. We kind of inherited a new sort of hometown, so let's go there and try it. We were there for ten years, and the shift to opening the store, that really came out of kind of what you brought up before about the change in the music industry at the time. So 2004, we get there, we get set up, got a warehouse space that the Smut Peddlers are practicing in and there's some people living there as well, so we had an HQ. And that's right when the economy tanked and, sorry to shift into business terms, but our target demographic, their disposable income got decimated by Bush's economy. So all of a sudden, everybody doesn't have fifteen, seventeen bucks to buy a new CD, check out new music, and you couple that with the advent of downloads...

MRR: I think that everyone, even like major labels and shit, probably especially major labels, really suffered right then if they weren't vinyl-only, because, you know, your vinyl-only labels were able to keep going.

Mark: Well, yeah, because they dug in, the ones that were committed, they had never relied on those things, so for those things to go away, whatever. You look at like Hostage Records, for example, who I always hold them up as a label that stayed just pure to the mission, just doing vinyl, just doing local bands. I think eventually they did a couple CD comps and maybe did one band that like wasn't from Orange County, you know, at 100 releases or something, but they just really had an identity and they stuck to it, and it allowed them to endure. But you know, you're right, you're talking about this whole business structure that was built on CDs and selling lots of CDs through the chain stores, and I was in on it. I don't care how fucking punk you say you were, just about everybody had been kind of co-opted into that, and sort of shame on us that we were relying on that. But you know, it's...we'd been asleep for the Clinton years, everybody was making money, no one was thinking about what's going on.

MRR: If you had to just guess you in the dark, what percentage of your sales were CDs vs. vinyl at that apex when the CDs were really moving?

Mark: Oh, 80, 90 percent.

MRR: That much.

Mark: Yeah, it was huge. We did vinyl because we could, but the vinyl was always operation break even and the CDs are going to pay for it. All right, we're going to do 500 or 1,000 LPs and sell them super cheap, sell them for just about what we're making wholesale, five bucks. Because we could, and—

MRR: You just did it because you could, because you believe in vinyl.

Mark: Yeah, and because this needs to exist. And we weren't even paying that much attention to who cut the lacquer or how good does this sound. It was just kind of like, "this exists, we're keeping it real 'cause we're still making records." I always had an affinity for especially the 7" format. I's just cheap, disposable, collectible. You know, I just I think right around the time when I started TKO I was super into collecting Chiswick records, Stiff records, Bomp!. All those

labels. Still am, but at the time, that was in a big way my inspiration. I've always had that personal love of vinyl, but as far as the label, CDs were definitely driving the car. And, you know, after a couple years of trying to do things the same way and hoping that it was going to come back, I just said "this isn't working." That was right around the time when a lot of the old sort of time-honored Orange County record stores...Orange County had this reputation for years of being a destination for record collectors. I mean, every time I was with a band and I knew we were going to go down and be in Orange County for a day..."all right, I got $200 to go to Vinyl Solution, Noise Noise Noise," have it all planned out. You could walk in there with whatever money you had, and there was so much you had to leave, it was like—

MRR: There'd be boxes that you be like "fuck, fuck, fuck!"

Mark: Orange County had that well-earned reputation and—

MRR: And well-stuffed coffers.

Mark: And this is right around, say, 2006–2007, a lot of these places started going under. And I remember one Christmas sitting in our warehouse space, which had no signage, no profile at all, it was not something designed for the public to come to. We had people around Christmas coming into our office because they found us online or in the phone book or something and were hoping we were a record store because they wanted to buy *Bing Crosby Sings Christmas Songs* and they couldn't find any record stores. They're like, "fuck, are you a record store?!" You know what man, if they're already coming to us and my landlord is trying to raise the rent and I've signed this lease and I'm going to be paying as much as a retail space, like, let's do a record store. Let's do a record store where we can run the label there and then we'll have a little area where people can just come and sell our stuff and whatever. We ended up taking the plunge and doing that, but very quickly we went from being a label that opened a store to being a store that had a label. In the beginning, that was mostly used vinyl, but again, with the progression of time, all the going on Craigslist and going to yard sales and storage auctions and stuff, that stuff started drying up. Used to be able to find Led Zeppelin records and Who records and Pink Floyd records and whatever, anywhere you threw a rock, and all of a sudden that stuff wasn't walking in as much anymore. I saw the needle go from like used to 50 / 50 with new, and then once it tipped to new's favor, I was like "wow this format is coming back," and that's really what kind of got me started on the path to starting this place.

MRR: When did you decide to do it? What was that first moment where you went "okay, if I'm going to do this,

where do I start?"

Mark: I mean, all this way that I'm describing it now, it all seems very calculated, but that's all looking back with reflection and saying, "oh yeah, of course." But at the time, the shove in that direction was that my wife and my older children, my daughter's coming to me around Christmas time 2013 and saying "Dad, we hate it here, we hate Orange County, all these Republicans." The girls are going to school and their peers are asking them "why don't you go to church, why are your parents covered in tattoos, my mom says tattoos are dirty." So I was like, "all right, well cool, let's bail from here. It's expensive, maybe we can be out of debt in our lifetime." So we started looking around, and Portland was always on the list, and it was the one that won out. A this point, I'm pretty much committed to, if I can, working for myself, so I'm like "okay, what's the next phase going to be? What are we going to do?" And again called on my network, called folks that I knew here in town that ran stores. While some people were kind of saying "yeah, come up, start a store, sure it'll be great," sort of the consensus I got was "you know what, Portland's got a lot of record stores, we're good." You know, Portland's got the most per capita in the country, and yeah, sure, you could come up here and do a store, but maybe you don't do anything that gets people excited and you fail, that would suck. Or maybe you come up and you kick ass and you put some other people out of business, and that kinda sucks too.

MRR: And you'd done the label, you'd been a record fiend your whole life, you've done a fucking store, it only made sense to kind of—

Mark: Yeah, and again, in hindsight, why not, but it really started with talking with Adam. Do you know Adam from Telegraph Mastering? Adam Gonsalves. He's one of the preeminent lacquer mastering engineers on the West Coast, part of this whole new generation that sort of helped foster the vinyl comeback. As you know, there's all these different steps in the process, and if if any one of those goes away or becomes inadequate, it can just fuck the whole thing up. So Adam at this point, he had gone through college, had a degree as a sound engineer, had been mastering for years and went and found an old scully lathe that was under bubble wrap in an old toy company where they had had it where they had cut—remember those talking dolls where you'd pull the string and they would talk—before they were computer chips those were little records. So this toy company that made these dolls had this lathe for the purpose of making mini records for dolls, then computer chips came around so they were like "ah, put that thing under a tarp and push it in the corner." And he found that thing and completely rebuilt it, restored it, and was cutting records again, and I was super impressed with that whole process, it just blew my mind, and so, just talking to him about moving here, ideas for doing something new and creative in Portland with music. I just remember asking him one time, "do you ever think about starting a plant?" and he was like "yeah, every day, but I don't have the money." I was like, "well, how much money do you think it'll be?" and he threw out a number that was, in hindsight, naïvely low.

MRR: I don't know what it was like for you, but these record presses were like dragons or something, like mythical creatures.

Mark: You know, it's funny you bring that up. When I was hanging out in Texas, when TKO was kind of in its early years and I was in Sound Exchange, and this guy behind the counter was like, "hey your label does a lot lot of 7"s, right? There's a guy who works here who has a 7" press he's selling, you should buy it." I was just, in my mind, like, "what, a 7" press, will it fit in my apartment?" I couldn't even comprehend. I remember seeing a little bit of footage from one of those reggae movies, *The Harder They Come* or *Rockers*, where it shows the guy just pressing right there and then playing it that night. It wasn't an involved step-by-step thing. I was thinking to myself, "is it just something you can crank with your hand—?"

MRR: But they are like mythical creatures. Where do you find one, and if you find it how bad is it—tell me about the first one you got. Or what happened between that?

Mark: It went from Adam sort of throwing out a number and just me with my bravado going, "oh yeah, I can find that money, yeah we can do this," with no plan or anything, so it immediately became this search. At the time, I just had surgery on my hands, so I had some downtime where I was just sitting at home on the computer, time to kill between naps and whatever, and so I just started looking around for a record press for sale, and ended up finding an old eBay auction that I don't think anyone had bid on that Dave from Lucky Lacquer had put up a few years ago. I guess he for a brief period had acquired an old Capitol machine, and I don't know the particulars of it, but the Capitol machines are not that common in the current pressing climate because they were proprietary in-house machines, so you couldn't just buy a Capitol machine. Capitol had the Capitol machines, and that was it. I've even talked to some people who have worked on them, and they said "yeah, they took all that stuff, they hired us to build that shit and then they took it from us. We can't show you the blueprints." David somehow had a Capitol machine, he had gotten rid of it, but I started picking his brain and said "how'd you find it?" and he put me in touch with this guy who is an equipment broker, the only one I've ever met. This guy on the East Coast who was a master engineer too, but he again, from him being involved in vinyl—he came from the EDM European electronic dance music scene, but still, like punk, very, very heavy vinyl focus, very dedicated to the format, so a lot of parallels there as far as our passions. So this guy Dietrich, Complete Mastery is the name of his mastering lab, so I just started networking with him. He was in touch with people in Jamaica, Africa, South America, Europe, and we'd get these photos forwarded to us of this decrepit, abandoned old machinery. We just started beating the bushes and seeing what we could find, and this is when we didn't have any money. If someone was like, "yes, we'll sell it to you right now," we would have been fucked because we didn't have our funds together. But we started the search, and there was a plant that was in the New York area called EKS and they had gone under, and the whole operation sold for what now would be a tremendous bargain. It's insane how much the equipment has gone up in value. But the Memphis plant, they beat us to the punch on that one. I'll just give you an example of how how cutthroat the market was for this stuff, 'cause keep in mind that we're starting to look for equipment right when the vinyl comeback is in full swing and all the existing plants are a six month waiting time, one year waiting time, "we're not taking new orders right now" time. So, every time there was, like, an article in *Rolling Stone* where Jack White talked about how cool vinyl was,

we were seeing these asking prices double. Like it went from five grand, ten grand, twenty grand—the asking price just kept jumping, jumping, jumping. But again, this illustrates how gnarly the market was. We found out about this lot of equipment that was in Jamaica, where the music industry is the largest per capita of a lot of places in the world, it's a whole lot. So in the '90s, when people were overnight over vinyl and the vinyl decline happened, a lot of that equipment went down to the Caribbean because there was still a lot of interest in dance 12"s and club records and DJs, that was going strong, so they got a lot of that stuff. So we started getting information on the stuff that was in Jamaica, and we started looking into working on going down there and checking it out and, again, didn't really have the money to do this, but we're just going the whole way, "we'll figure it out." So while that's going on, the broker contacts me and goes, "hey, these guys from Europe got in touch with me, and they offered me ten grand just to jump ahead of you in line to look at the stuff." And so I said to him, "look man, we don't have the money together, so go ahead and take their money and let them have our spot; it's cool, because you came and told me that and didn't do it behind my back. We'll catch the next one." He was like, "all right, cool," and I, at that point, was getting a little desperate. This whole time we hadn't been discussing our plans with anyone because we had been anticipating how much this shit was in demand and we figured that we might get bid out from under us like that. So I was talking to an American contact that I know that works in the pressing industry and showed my cards and said, "hey, we're looking at starting a plant in the Northwest, a small plant, I understand you know where equipment is and you maybe have some equipment for sale, would you consider that?" She said, "well, tell me about what've you done so far," and I told her about the situation in Jamaica—there was some stuff down there we were interested in, but these people came and paid to get ahead of us in line, so we're moving on—and she's like, "interesting, Jamaica, okay. I'll talk to you next week"—hangs up the phone. So what ended up happening was she was the person who had sold the equipment to the Jamaicans in the first place. She called down there and bought it all back, and so when those guys from Europe who paid the money to jump ahead of me, they landed in Jamaica and their stuff was gone. I's pretty slippery, especially when you have all these folks that have been doing this for decades, back to the '80s and '70s and '60s, they all know each other, they all know where everything is. In hindsight it's pretty funny, but I remember it kind of blew my mind when I heard that. Anyway, we were very lucky. We ended up kind of endearing ourselves to this plant in Canada that we knew had equipment that they weren't using that they'd had for years, and I just would call them up and leave these very polite messages, say "I'm interested in talking to you about the equipment you've got in storage," and eventually they decided they wanted to sell and they called us. I think just really out of being polite and diligent we got the first crack at that stuff, and that's really what made it all possible. If that hadn't had worked out I really don't know if any of this would have happened. I mean, we were really fortunate to get that stuff, fortunate to get it in the condition it was in, for the price that we did, that they were willing to break the lot up. They had a lot more stuff they were trying to sell, but we just couldn't afford it all, so they were willing to kind of make an exception there. Very, very fortunate.

MRR: What did you acquire from them?

Mark: We got from them six machines that originally came from the Hub Servall plant on the East Coast of New Jersey. So they are Miller presses, and then they have the Hamilton automation, so kind of like the CBS machines. The Miller presses were only at Hub Servall, you couldn't just go buy Miller equipment. Hamilton was a company that made their own presses, but then they also had their automation system that they would sell to people who had manual presses that weren't automated, you could just bolt onto the existing hardware. Then they were also the ones who designed the CAF and stuff. I mean, they really were kind of almost like an aerospace level machine company that because of their proximity to New York, I guess, ended up getting into record making. So yeah, we got six presses and extruders, a bunch of carts and tables, the old central hydraulic system that we didn't end up using because of the way the Hub Servall plant was set up, it had 24–25 presses that were all, the hydraulic surface was spidered in from

this massive central unit and we got that thing down here and it was just overkill for what we were trying to do. It was an old inefficient electric motor from the '70s and way too much power, way more power than we'd ever need, so we ended up just scrapping it and having to build our own individual stand-alone hydraulic unit for the presses.

MRR: And those six presses are basically what drives you now.

Mark: Yeah, absolutely. We're running five of them right now, one of them hasn't been completely restored yet. They were in fairly good shape, but they had been mothballed since the '90s, so they were in need of a lot of repair. Rather than trying to get six machines all running at the same time and be fighting six different sets of problems, we just focused in on the first machine and just tricked it out and got it completely dialed in and then just repeated that. That was really Jeff's idea, and I'm glad we went that way. The last one is kind of skeletal, it's missing a lot of shit because it's been cannibalized by the other one, but it's just a matter of investing the time and a few thousand dollars in parts. It will eventually be up and running too.

MRR: And you have 7" presses that are running.

Mark: Right. A little while ago, we purchased an S&T 3600. S&T is one of the big established brands of American pressing equipment. The 3600 was their model that's dual cavity, so it's set up to make two 7"s at the same time. So we've got one of those and again we, because of our limited space and the limited amount of electrical power we have left in our service here at the spot, we have to be kind of strategic in how we plan to expand. Our thinking with that was that would be able to add the 7" format and have a dedicated press that would put out a high volume for a single machine, so again, that all sounds good in theory. However, the 3600 was one of the rarer machines, so we ended up spending a lot longer than we anticipated tracking down all the parts and the resources, the blueprints, the operational guides, the parts list, all that stuff. It's taking a while. Where we had our first Miller Hamilton up inside of less than six months, we've had the S&T for two years now and, if we play our cards right, will be making 7"s by the end of the year, so it's been a process.

MRR: That's exciting still.

Mark: Yeah. And that, and all this stuff, all this old vintage gear, these are machines that have been in use for decades, so they have all this history and all this interesting backstory. I mean, those Miller Hamiltons had just old records in the pressing table, just hanging out in there for protection of molds or whatever, and the ones that were in ours when we got them on the truck were Ol' Dirty Bastard 12"s. The 7" press that we got came from Miami, it came out of a plant that was called Final Vinyl, and it was owned by Joe Gibbs who is a famous reggae producer, and he ran that plant in the '70s. I don't know all the details, but from what I understand, he was bootlegging Charley Pride records and the FBI was coming after him, so he sold the plant to another—you're talking about like the Mount Rushmore of reggae here—Coxsone Dodd from Studio One. He sold his plant to Dodd, and then he bounced to get away from the FBI, and then Dodd I guess ran the plant from Miami on and off until he died. Then I believe his family attempted to keep it going for a while but weren't successful, so we ended up buying it from the guy who purchased it from them. When we got it, all the strain relief and all the electrical connections had been hacked apart with a machete because they were worried about people going in and using the equipment when they weren't there. So that's another reason why it's taking so long, we had to completely rewire that stuff. Really, there's so much untold history on this side of the business. When I talk to some of these veterans, I always ask them, "hey man, when are you going to write your book? If you die without getting all the stuff down, there's all the stuff that's going to be forgotten, all these crazy stories about bootlegging and hacking and buying equipment and stealing equipment..." To me, anyway, it's interesting stuff. And just in the brief time I've been doing it, I have barely scratched the surface. It's such a head trip, so, oh yeah, punk rock.

MRR: How much of the production that you do is based out of the greater punk community that you've been involved with? I mean, you've been involved with this community for so long.

Mark: A good chunk of it. I mean we definitely, when we started making the calls and letting people know what we were doing, we were tapping folks on the shoulder that I'd known from the label, the store, and very fortunately a lot of them took a chance with us early on, and a lot of them have stuck around and continue to give us business. I have to mention that our first customer was Eric and Mississippi Records, and without his early support I really question how

we could have got off the ground. With nothing other than just meeting us and liking the idea, with us having no example of our work or our competency at this, he booked out a massive amount of work in advance and put deposits on it, on all these jobs for us to do. I'm going to be grateful for him for the rest of my life. And that definitely cemented the values that we have here. Cascade is, yes, a business and I am trying to make a living and feed my family, but I also want this to be a resource for the Portland music community and the Northwest music community, the independent music community. Try to pay everyone a living wage, just trying to create a place that can give a career to people who never really would consider a career before, people that were just sort of career averse. The whole notion of the whole the word "career" is like, "what, fuck that, I'm going to hustle and do my thing and live the way I want to live," 'cause this is how I grew up. Somehow I'm still alive in my mid-40s and into this whole punk thing.

MRR: Have you broken even yet?
Mark: It depends on who you ask. We're keeping the lights on. This is a very difficult business. I know that from the outside, you look and go, "you guys got money. It's records, and everyone wants records." The reality is, the margins are very slim, and we are a five press plant that runs a single shift, and we're competing with plants that can do in a day what it takes us to do in a week. We're completely dwarfed by some of the mega plants out there, and then at the same time, when we came online we were the sixteenth plant in North America, so now with the advent of this new equipment that's popped up, there are now over 30 plants.

MRR: When you started TKO, around the time that I started my label, turnaround was couple months maybe.
Mark: Yeah, you were writing for the print more than anything. I was laughing about that—

MRR: —stacks of records in your apartment, no covers 'cause punk bands never have art. It's like the classic thing, you're waiting for art, and now it's like, I think the last thing I put out, Sloppy Kisses or something, they had their shit together, they had their art, I had the cover sitting there on my kitchen counter for like eight months.
Mark: Eight fucking months, wow. You know, I'm sure that sometime in the first couple years we might have had a record that took that long. Nowadays, unless there's something that derails it, we shoot for three months.

MRR: That's reasonable.
Mark: And I haven't checked to see what it is at other plants right now, but I think again because of all the new places that have opened up, that's allowed it to stabilize a little bit. Three months is reasonable. I mean, you have to approve the test pressing and a lot of that stuff. You know, in the '50s, a pressing plant would, have a studio there, they'd their lathe there, the printing operation there, they would make their compound there, they'd have these big fucking machines that like kneaded the plastic like dough, you know, and then it comes off the line on this conveyor belt and I mean, the whole thing soup to nuts was under one roof. And then, in probably the late '60s, early '70s, the business has been around awhile, it's booming, it's specialized. Recording engineers went from being these guys who actually look like scientists in lab coats to Phil Spector or Jack Nitzsche or Joe Meek. You had these guys that were like, "no, I don't work for the record label, I work for me. You want my sound, you got to come to me and my studio." And then that happened not only with the recording engineers but with the mastering engineers. I mean it specialized, it splintered, decentralized, and now people like me are digging through the ruins of this once massive, decentralized business trying to draw everything back and do as much as we can under one roof. We don't plate here, we don't cut here, we don't do print here. I've got the printing equipment, I've got to clean it up and fix it up and set it up. I want to offer some printing, but right now we don't do that. Labels. We've got to outsource all that stuff. I mean, there's a lot of prep work that whoever's doing the project has to do before they bring it to us, but also when they bring it to us we're outsourcing a lot of these services. And you're right that a lot of how those services aren't directly under our control. However, if we took a deposit, if we receive funds to chaperone and oversee those services, it's our responsibility. Nobody wants to hear "oh, it's not my fault, the plating engineer screwed up or the print company's behind." That's cool dude, we gave you money, we're talking to you about this.

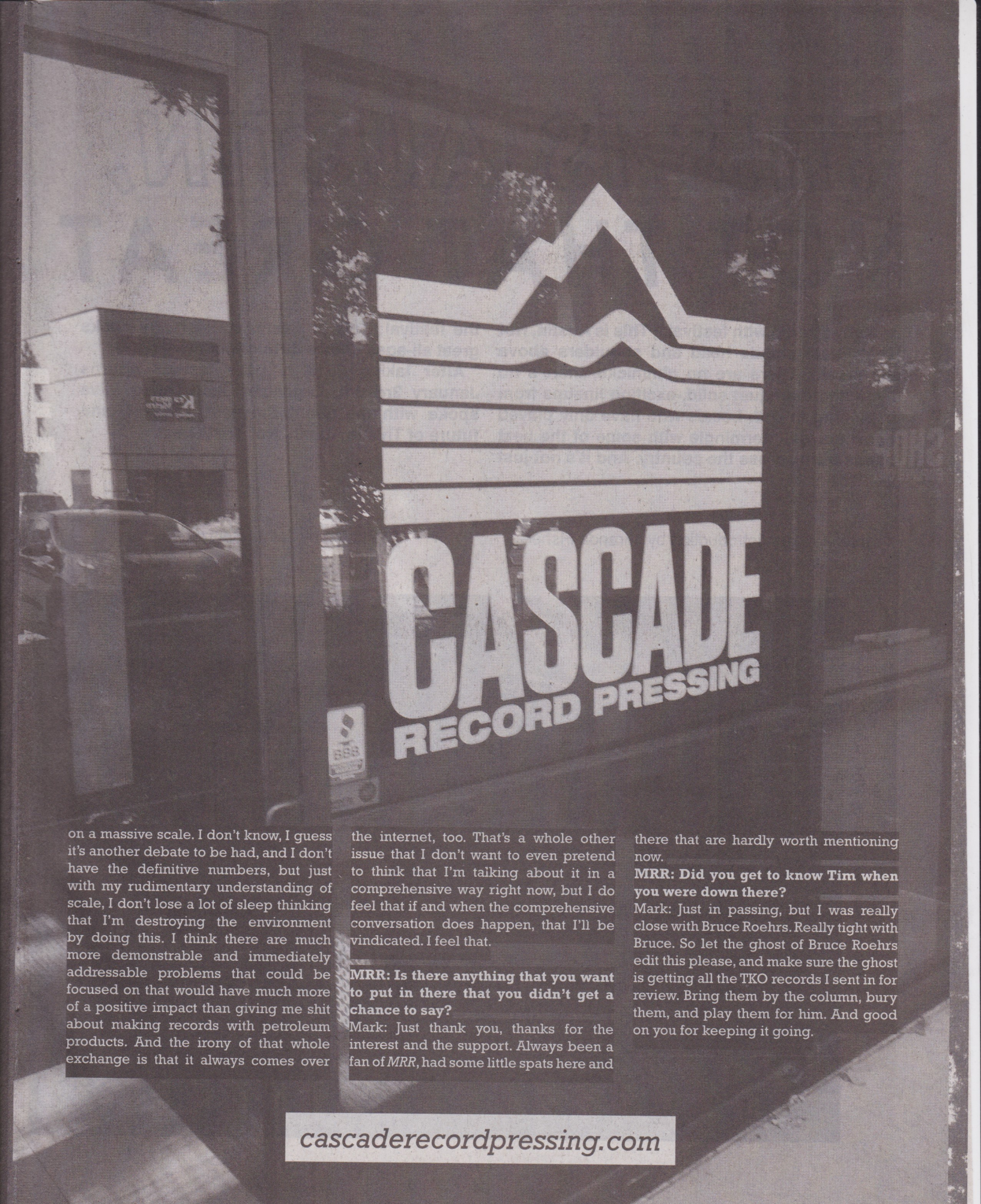
MRR: What's next, man? You going to get the 7"s going?
Mark: 7"s, in-house printing and, yeah, just trying to get better at what we do every day. Just trying to find ways, whatever we have to do to just do things better, quicker, higher-quality, more efficient. This is not a set-it-and-forget-it gig at all, this is tough, it changes. The weather, the humidity, the atmosphere conditions—

MRR: Oh, that was something I was going to ask you—
Mark: I mean there's all these facets.

MRR: The price of oil—
Mark: Yes, we haven't seen that happen yet, but for the materials that we get from overseas, who knows what fucking trade wars this goofy president is going to do, how that's going to affect things. I don't know. It's interesting. I haven't seen it directed so much at us, but it is something that does pop up sometimes when vinyl is being discussed—people talk about the environmental impact. Yes, it is a petroleum-based product, polyvinyl carbonate, and I've heard people say "you should just put it on the internet," and I wonder if those people have ever considered the resources and the environmental impact of keeping the internet up and running versus just how much petroleum we are using.

MRR: It's an easy target.
Mark: I mean, you know, they're trying to equate us with gasoline or something, and if you actually looked at the production amount and consumption amount and then again compared that to—

MRR: The environmental impact of the battery in this phone that we're recording this conversation on—
Mark: Or the electrical power necessary to keep the servers running. It's just silly—I mean, as far as our operations here, we recycle and reuse all of the reject records and waste records, the flash, we do that all on site here. Grind it up. Our water cooling system is gray, so we recycle that, too. Otherwise, if we didn't, we'd be flushing like 70 gallons a minute down the drain or something. it's just kind of part of the process here. We let a little water vapor in the air, that's about it. I mean, I imagine the plating process is problematic, but again, I think there's a way that that occurs responsibly, in a contained way, and it's not happening



on a massive scale. I don't know, I guess it's another debate to be had, and I don't have the definitive numbers, but just with my rudimentary understanding of scale, I don't lose a lot of sleep thinking that I'm destroying the environment by doing this. I think there are much more demonstrable and immediately addressable problems that could be focused on that would have much more of a positive impact than giving me shit about making records with petroleum products. And the irony of that whole exchange is that it always comes over the internet, too. That's a whole other issue that I don't want to even pretend to think that I'm talking about it in a comprehensive way right now, but I do feel that if and when the comprehensive conversation does happen, that I'll be vindicated. I feel that.

MRR: Is there anything that you want to put in there that you didn't get a chance to say?

Mark: Just thank you, thanks for the interest and the support. Always been a fan of *MRR*, had some little spats here and there that are hardly worth mentioning now.

MRR: Did you get to know Tim when you were down there?

Mark: Just in passing, but I was really close with Bruce Roehrs. Really tight with Bruce. So let the ghost of Bruce Roehrs edit this please, and make sure the ghost is getting all the TKO records I sent in for review. Bring them by the column, bury them, and play them for him. And good on you for keeping it going.

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THIS IS AUSTIN, NOT THAT GREAT

In a city littered with festivals, This Is Austin, Not That Great stands head and shoulders above the crowd. There are no gimmicks, there's no hype, there are just solid, exciting lineups from beginning to end. Locals who have only played a few shows intermingle with some of the best bands from across the country. And it's not just the festival; This Is Austin consistently books great all-ages shows throughout the year.

After taking 2018 off, the festival returns January 3rd–6th. Organizer Juan-Carlos Silva spoke with me about the past, present, and future of This Is Austin, Not That Great.

Interview and introduction by Miranda Fisher.

Photos by Jaime Salazar.

Juan-Carlos Silva in Strutter
This is Austin, Not Tht Great 2016

Tell me about how This Is Austin, Not That Great started.
Chaos in Texas ended in the middle of a youth explosion of punk renaissance, and there was no platform for it to be showcased. I was bored and directionless and had nothing to lose, so I decided to open up a couple of credit cards and risk my financial stability to buy a few flights and have a big party to showcase said youth explosion.

Do you think Austin is still in the midst of a youth explosion?
It is somewhat. We have bands like Army, Enemy One, and Choir Cherry. I'm sure within the next year there will be another wave of bands with even younger members.

What happens when those young people grow up? What do you think are the positives and negatives of having such a young scene? How has your position within the scene changed as you got older?
My position in the scene hasn't changed too much except I don't get out as much as I used to. I feel like every scene is the same in that people come and go and very few people are constant in their respective cities, but I doubt we'll ever have a shortage of underage freaks looking for acceptance. The only negative I can think of is difficulties with the price of booking venues, but we have plenty of DIY options right now.

Speaking of that, the fest has been at different venues over its three years. What's the reasoning for that?
The reason I moved the main shows the second year is because I wanted to keep everything close together. The public transit system in Austin is trash, so it was basically a choice to make things easier for out-of-owners. This year I moved the day shows to Beerland because it's even closer to the main shows and it is now an all ages venue.

Is it important to you to keep the shows all ages?
Keeping shows all ages has been the most important thing to me when it comes to booking shows. If it wasn't, I'd be alienating half the scene.

Do you feel like changing venues from year to year reflects something about how Austin itself is changing?
Austin is changing constantly and expanding rapidly and it has taken a toll on local businesses (not that their hands are completely clean either), so it has made keeping a venue open pretty hard, especially DIY venues, but Austin will always have some resource that we can utilize.

What have been some highlights from the first two years of the fest?
Ajax covering Motörhead, DLIMC in a warehouse, and Tommy Wright III screaming "This is Austin Not That Great" over and over again.

What's been the most difficult challenge so far?
Everything. I'm extremely unorganized; I really don't get how I get away with this shit.

How does This Is Austin function on, say, a week-to-week basis? How do you balance booking normal shows with planning the larger fest?
I'm a very disorganized person, so I usually rely on a helping hand from my childhood friend Danny Castaneda, who is a very important component of This Is Austin. Ever since I started driving and tour managing bands, booking became a little trickier, so I have to call on him to do my bidding. When I'm at home and not touring, I'm working for shit pay and wallowing in a life threatening depression just like every other punk, but I'm still able to book a few shows every few months. But lately most shows that have been happening have been booked by other locals in the scene, which is a good thing. If anything, that's one of the things I wanted to see happen after doing this fest. I actually booked a lot of the bands on the fest while on tour with my band or others.

There are so many festivals and so many people booking shows in Austin. How do you think This Is Austin distinguishes itself? What makes it special?
I think the only difference between this fest and other Austin fests is that it's the closest thing we have to Chaos in Tejas. The most special thing is that loads and loads of people show out for a show that doesn't have a single big headliner or reunion band. As far as booking entities go, I don't compete with anyone because my main objective is to get bands paid. I collaborate with other friends who book shows all the time. If anything, I encourage more people to book shows so I don't have to.

The fest has Austin in the title, but it's not a locals-only event; you've got bands playing from all over the world. How do you see the role of Austin as a city in the event? Or how do you see the event's role in Austin's scene?
Well, one of the main goals of this fest when I first started was not just to bring great acts from around to world for the people of Austin (and Texas) to enjoy, but to showcase our talents to the rest of the international community and show them that Austin, and Texas, is a great place for punk and to inspire them to be our friends and come back on future tours. As far as the fest's role in Austin, I see it as a way to shake up the traditions that Austin has as the "live music capital of the world" and show them we're not here to contribute to the local economy or bring in tourists. We're here to say "Fuck you Ted Cruz, Fuck you Greg Abbott, we need something better."

When you bring in bands from outside of Austin, what do you try to show them in the city? I mean that both in terms of, like, where do you bring them, but also what's the impression that you want to get of Austin? What is it that makes the city special?
I try not to be too much of a tour guide and let people decide what they want to see. Most people want to go swimming, eat at food trucks they heard about, or shop at End of an Ear (the best record store in town) but I still fancy myself a fun host. If people want a different experience, I just take them to secret rooftop hangout spots or tunnels or some delinquent shit. But the only thing that makes any city special is the people; even outside the punk scene, the city is filled with characters good and bad. Someone once told me that everyone in Austin seems super chill and laid back until they get wasted and all of a sudden everyone is rowdy and wild. Most people take away a similar assessment, along with the fact that the city is also filled with stuffy rich whites, coked up gentrifiers, frat bros, and racist shit-kickers.

You mentioned Greg Abbott and Ted Cruz, both of whom just got re-elected. What does it mean to be a part of a punk

scene in such a hostile environment? How does that affect the choices that you make? What would it be like if Greg Abbott showed up at the fest this year?
Being punk is a necessity living in Texas. It's protected and empowered me. It taught me how to defend myself. Sometimes it gets you in danger. I've been doxed by the Klan and Proud Boys because of confrontations and protests. But it's still important to fight these fuckers on every front. That said, I'm sure Greg Abbott has never heard of the fest. But if he did, I'd be on a watch list somewhere because the first year's flier had a depiction of the Svart Framtid angels wearing Ted Cruz's decapitated head like a mask.

The last edition of the festival had a reading as an opening event. This year has an art show related to the fest, and a raffle to benefit RAICES. Do you see This Is Austin as a music festival, or as something more?
At its core it is a music festival, but it being "punk" in nature also means it's not just a party. It's a place for people to have their voices heard; it's a place for people to come together and help each other. Every punk community knows this, especially after Trump's election. The important thing for people to take away from this is that there are ways we can bring about revolutionary action and change our current situation if we put in a little effort and support and listen to each other.

The festival is back this year after taking last year off. What made you come back? What made you skip a year?
I was just dead broke. I was paralyzed by depression and anxiety and couldn't really hold much together. My family was (and is) in need of financial support. I come from a family of undocumented immigrants and who don't have access to things like Medicaid. I just needed the time to hustle.

Is the festival something that you've ever been able to make your money back on? And if you don't, what makes you want to keep doing it?
It has been able to pay itself off, but it just takes a lot of time and effort to make it so. If I take a loss, it wouldn't be the first time I sank copious amounts of money and time into something that never paid off, so I can't really sweat it. I'm constantly in debt, so it'd be nothing new. At the very least, we'll be able to raise a little money for a good cause, and that's what matters.

What factors were important to you when booking bands for the fest? Which bands are you particularly excited about?
A big thing for me was not having hyped up headliners. I want the majority of the bands to be somewhat fresh and representative of the current national punk scene. I'm very excited to see the Dark, Druj, Tarantula, Kaleidoscope, Twisted Thing, Nueva Fuerza, and Urbanoia.

What do you hope to achieve with this year's fest? Where do you see This Is Austin heading after this?
I'm just trying to facilitate a good time. I hope it makes connections for people. I hope new bands start out of new friendships. I don't see much changing about the fest other than, perhaps, switching the date to a warmer time of the year. The fest has been too good to me for me to deviate from the formula.

What do you want people to take away from this interview?
I want people to take away money from their hard earned paychecks and spend it on tickets to the fest .

Punks relaxing
This is Austin, Not Tht Great 2016

THIS IS AUSTIN

NOT THAT GREAT Ⓐ

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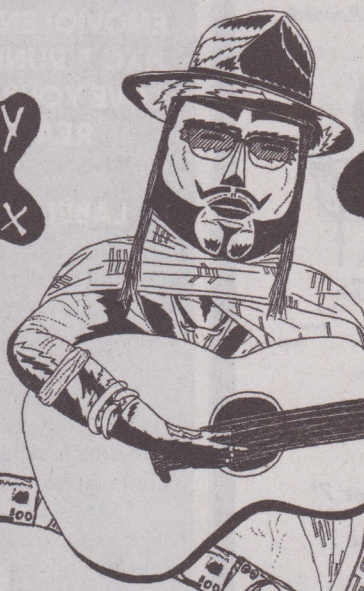
too short a life to show how much i hate you.



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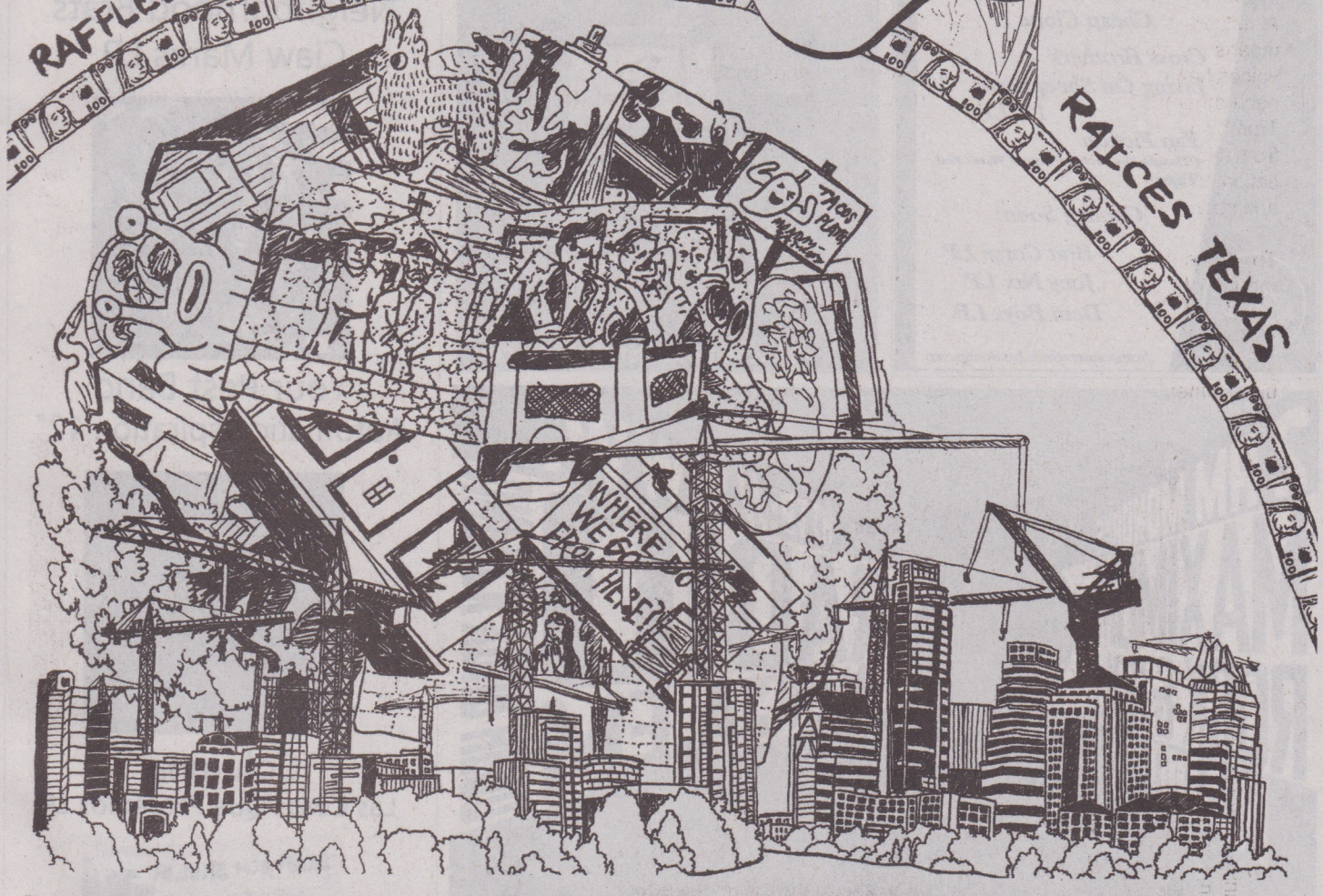

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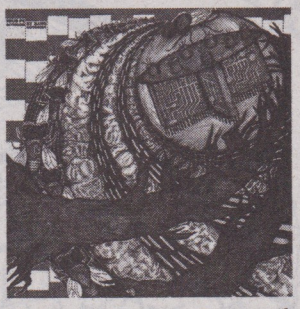

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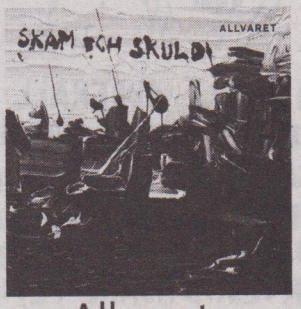

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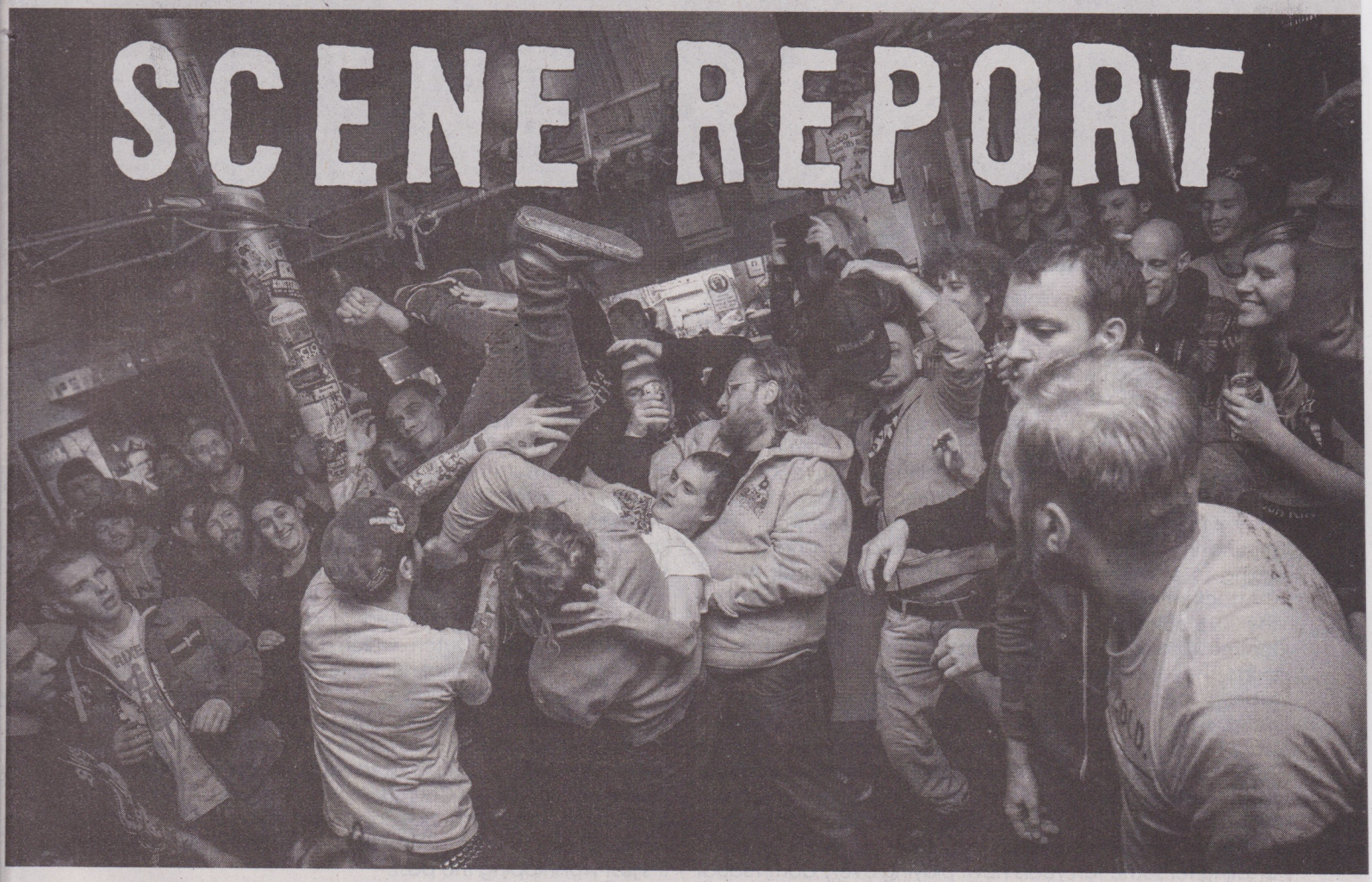
SCENE REPORT



Report by Mario Liesens.

Photos by Nele Vandermaesen.

When people try to put punk and Belgium in an equation, they usually end up with the Kids or Zyklome A, depending on what era they glorify. Truth is, Belgium has far more to offer right now than back then. I know Belgium is just a shithole, and if it wasn't for beer, chocolate, sprouts, Brussels, and international jihad, no one would even know it existed, but honestly, we do have some great bands, venues and people in our little scene.

Sects Tape, for example, managed to blow me away completely. This weirdo-garage-punk outfit from Doornik has a thing for pink Ku Klux Klan hats, giving their shows a dark, haunting atmosphere. The music itself has a distinct garage vibe, a dash of surf, but is heavy, brooding and the perfect background noise for a bonafide psychosis. They have some EPs out and a full length on Spastic Fantastic. I urge you to check it out. Buy the records, but most importantly, check 'em out live. You won't regret it. They have a website in English, French and Klingon(!), but like with most people and bands nowadays, you can track 'em down on Facebook for the latest news.

Lose the pink hats, strip down the music, turn up the distortion, throw in some female vocals, and you get **Cocaine Piss**. Tags: punk, crust, noise, queer, Liege... I can get most of it, but the crust part I missed somehow. Even though their noisy punk sometimes can seriously pick up speed, most of it is just upbeat racket. Brilliant racket, but not exactly crusty in a Dis-kinda way. The vocals can best be described as high pitched shrieking à la Sad Boys or Runt on an odd day, so it takes some getting used to. Their demo sold out really fast, but fortunately Hypertension rereleased it on a 12".

Cheap Drugs

They also released an album mixed by Steve Albini in 2016, and their latest effort is a 12" called *Piñacolalove*, again on Hypertension. Yeah, more noise to test your stamina. Live they can best be described as discomforting. Trust me, you'll agree once you've seen them.

When we talk about crust in Belgium, **Visions of War** comes to mind. They're not the most prolific band when it comes to releases, but they're still alive and they even recorded a new ep in 2017 (a split with **Hellkrusher**). Actually, I thought they would call it a day after their drummer Yvan went missing in Indonesia, but they're still around and they're going to play some crucial gigs this year. **Matrak Attakk** ("Attack with a Police Bat") shared the stage with them on the 2018 edition of Frost Punx Picnic in Mülheim (Germany). **Matrak Attakk** are a heavy crust band with some grind parts. They released a CD in 2016 on Vleesklak. This Belgian label is specialized in the heavier side of punk, i.e. grind, noise, powerviolence and the like. ("Vleesklak" is slang for bald head and can be translated as "hat made of skin.") They have an LP due out this year. **Silence Means Death** put a bit more rock'n'roll in their crust with lots of Motörhead worship, like a heavier Skitkids. Made up by members of **Nahende Vernichtung** and **Fart**, these guys have been crusting for some ten years now, playing every damn squat around, and releasing (only) two split albums. Yep, not very prolific either. Seems like a crust thing: always ready to party and drink, but too hangover to release something.

The true master of record overkill, not only in Belgium but worldwide, still is **Agathocles**. I think they have a separate room in the MRR archives for all their split EPs and LPs... If you take into account the tapes they've released as well and their appearances on compilations, they're about to reach the 500th release sometime soon. Someone on the internet put it in the right perspective: "*Who cares if they are not the world's best musicians, if they are repetitive, etc. Their noise is so much better than any overproduced band. Hats off, 'cause they are still loyal to real grindcore and underground / DIY ideals.*" And that's true. Even after 30 years, they stick to the ideals of the DIY scene and they've played virtually anywhere on the planet. And whether it's in the Amazon or in Southeast Asia, you'll always find a nutcase with an **Agathocles** t-shirt who has at least 50 of their EPs.

Speaking of veterans, I don't know if **'T Vettig Front** ("the Nasty Front") is still alive to serve us some raw and fast '82 punk that reminds me a bit of No Debt. But their members are still 100% devoted to punk. They do have a CD-R demo out that is free for download on their bandcamp page. Do it!

Also vettig is **Vettige Kanarie** ("Foul-mouthed Canary"). They play ultra shambolic grind-noise shit. I wouldn't even mention them if it wasn't for the fact that they've been doing it for some fifteen years by now. Is it dedication, is it being stubborn or is it just being completely idiotic? I don't know, but these guys manage to make me laugh out loud, something that is missing most of the time in the scene.

To celebrate their 20th birthday, **Ulrikes Dream** released a brand new album called *Anarchie in Leuven*. It's completely sung in Dutch, which is quite refreshing as not too many bands do that. **Ulrike** serves metal-tinged crusty punk. I think they also had some grind parts but lost them somewhere down the years. These people are firmly rooted in the squat scene from Leuven. A few years ago they did a project with some people of **Usual Suspects** and **Intestinal Disease** called **Death Church**. As you can guess, it's related to Rudimentary Peni. Basically they played their entire *Death Church* album, hence the name. Pretty cool, even if it's just worshipping the past.

Kingterror is no more, but Nico Terror (is everyone in Belgium called Nico?) started a new project. **Travølta** is the name, and powerviolence is the game. Not for the ill-hearted. Their latest release is a split album with **Marxbros** (Chris Dodge + two guys from **Lärm**, so brace yerself). They also have a split ep with **Gewoon Fucking Raggen** and one with **Days Of Desolation**. Not with **Agathocles**. Yet. I might be wrong, but I think Nico also runs a label called Loner Cult that specializes in music that makes you weep (grindcore, powerviolence etc).

Pretty active guy, this Nico. Word is he and some friends just started a brand new project as well called **Arrogänt**. And this time they're aiming for a slightly more accessible sound: D-beat crust. I can't wait to catch 'em live.

Days of Desolation go for heavy crust, the kind of stuff Profane Existence would go nuts about. They have released four split EPs so far in their seven-year existence and are about to release a split LP this year with **Smäris**. Their guitar

Hetze

player Jasper "Infested Art" Swerts is one swell graphic artist. If you are in dire need of a skull on your patch, or artwork for your record, get in touch. The latest news, however, is that **Smäris** broke up so no joint effort, but new releases with **Noisear** and the **Bludgeoning** are about to make your life even more miserable.

Reproach is still going strong with eighteen years of thrashing, moshing, and playing furious hardcore that can even make the catatonic join the circle pit. They haven't released much lately, but they're still gigging a lot. Stijn Reproach is also playing in **Blind to Faith**, going for a bit more metallic direction. They're considering releasing new stuff in 2018. Let's hope they will as it would be almost ten years since their first album. Lazy fucks! Stijn is also playing in a new project called **Raw Peace**. There's nothing peaceful about them, but they're absolutely right about the raw part: fast and heavy hardcore that makes your eardrums bleed. They released a demo last year, check it out on bandcamp. And an album is on the way.

Men don't have a monopoly on raw punk, you know. **Hetze** is a 75% female band who will blast you away. While they played their first gig just in March of 2018, they already have a 12" out by now called *Bedbugs*. It's fast, uncompromising, and you should buy it. **Permanent Debt** from Antwerp are a fairly new band as well. They go for the heavier and gruff punk hardcore sound. Their demo reminds me a bit of Sleeper Cell (maybe not the best known reference but it fits the description pretty good) but live they have a rawer and unpolished sound. You can't find them on Facebook (yet). That's old school, man. They do have a bandcamp, where you can check out their demo, and by the time you're reading this, their first 7" will be out.

Vogue, the hardcore band that put Belgium back on the map, ceased to be. They played their final gig in Antwerp on the same day **Herätys** was playing at the Pits in Kortrijk. Can you imagine the dilemma? Since Belgium is such a tiny shithole, distance means nothing and I managed to be at both concerts. What was supposed to be a sad day for the Belgian scene, turned out for the better as two bands emerged out of **Vogue**: **Cheap Drugs** and **Imaginary Dictionary**. Both bands have been gigging hard and have released a slew of records, both on Hardware (so you simply know it's good!). Hardcore punk with a 21st century touch without sounding too metal. **Imaginary Dictionary** played their last concert in 2016, but **Cheap Drugs** carried on playing concerts up to this year and released a split ep with **Sunpower** in 2017 on Spastic Fantastic. The latest news, however, is that they cancelled their tour in 2018 and are going on a hiatus due to personal reasons. Let's hope they work it out and continue to serve some top notch noise. On the positive side, though, members from both bands have set up a new project called **Haemers**, who played their first gig in February. They're named after the notorious Belgian criminal (no, not our king) Patrick Haemers who spend the '80s robbing money convoys and kidnapping a politician before being captured in Brazil. They have a three-song demo out that rocks pretty hard. Gruff hardcore. Yummy.

I've been working long on this scene report; some things have changed in the process, and by now **Cheap Drugs** are back for some final concerts. **Imaginary Dictionary** stays dead, but they've released an EP in 2018 nevertheless with even an old **Vogue** song on it. It's only available at concerts so tough luck finding it.

Sunpower have been around since like forever. When it comes to classic hardcore, this is the band you wanna see. US inspired hardcore served with a dash of Dead Kennedys and Misfits (without the ghoul element). At one of **Sunpower**'s concerts, some guy took Lionel Richie's song as gospel and tried to dance on the ceiling by swinging on a beam, slightly impaling the singer as the thing came tumbling down. You can find footage on YouTube if you fancy. They have plenty of records out, buy them!

Black Heroin is a fairly young band from Gent. They started out in the spring of 2016, cranking out some fierce punk hardcore. They haven't released anything, but you can check out some songs on bandcamp. High time for a vinyl release! "Revenge" is an awesome track, nice peaceful lyrics too. Sven, their guitarist has a lifetime ban on Ryanair. Talk about achievements!

I like my hardcore pure, and **CLCKWS** deliver it just that way: fast, powerful, relentless and no guitar wanking. They had a female singer that lifted the band way above average. Sadly, she called it a day, but you can still enjoy it on their demo. There was a very limited edition 10" (only

25 copies if I'm correct), but you can get the tape or CD (yikes) directly from the band. Songs like "Invertebrate" and "Amused" are fucking hits. Thank god they decided to continue and with a new singer they're ready to kick ass again. For those in the know, they remind me a bit of **Charlie Don't Surf** (and that's fucking good)

Even the comatose are more active than **Cut Here**, but they still exist and play from time to time. They go for fast punk hardcore that could easily fit on Kangaroo. Think Out Cold or Urban DK. When I saw them in Antwerp, they opened with an Exploited song ("Cop Cars") though. Funny!

Darmstadt go for the raw and unpolished crusty sound, very Scandinavian. A few guitar licks just to let you know they are also into Discharge. You can still trace down their 2016 EP easily. Give it a spin, it rocks!

The End of Ernie are still at it, albeit in their ninth line up. For over twenty years, they've been delivering fast punk with hints of crust, streetpunk, and crossover. In 2017, they self-released an album called *When the Fun Is Over* that's still available. If I'm correct, they did some crowdfunding to help it getting released. The Ejected "Have You Got 10p" starts to play in my head when I think about this funding, and the next thought is "good luck with that," but somehow they succeeded. For 2019, they're planning a "90 Minutes Blackout" tour across Europe. They need some venues to play so get in touch.

They say a **VVOVNDS** full-length album almost seems like a physical impossibility to sit through, and I have to admit that it is quite challenging. They score high on the scale of uneasy listening with their brand of hardcore noise. It's harsh, vile, brutal...and it won't cheer you up. But they definitely deserve your attention. They've just released a split 12" with **Soul Grip** on Hypertension. With **Soul Grip** being a post / black metal band, **VVOVNDS** show us they are not narrow minded and strictly reserved to the punk / hardcore scene.

Diss Guy is no Discharge worship but kicks ass nevertheless. Angry, spastic HC punk to boot. Plenty of tempo changes. Nice! They did an EP in 2017 and about to release an album later this year.

Ero Guro hail from Diest, the same city that gave birth to **Intestinal Disease**, but unlike the latter, **Ero Guro** goes garage punk all the way. They've recorded some songs that you can listen to on bandcamp. I hate it when people can't be arsed to do a proper release, but it seems like at the moment we will have to settle for just that. The music is great though. As for **Intestinal Disease**, I thought they called it a day long time ago, but it seems like they're still at it, grinding away, playing music that will indeed upset your bowels. Kudos for that.

"*Born and raised under the pale grey sky of Brussels, where there is nothing but rain, nothing but pain,* ***Ceasefire*** *is discharging since 2014.*" It sounds so poetic, but methinks Brussels is just a shithole and sunshine won't make it any better. **Ceasefire** did, however, discharge like hell and wrote some awesome songs that are free for download. They however ceased fire altogether early this year, but out of their ashes rose two new bands: **On Fire** and **Smokebomb**. (How many puns can you handle?) **On Fire** decided to go for old school punk hardcore. There's little information to be found on them, but if you get in touch through the **Ceasefire** Facebook thing, I'm pretty sure you'll get a hold on them. **Smokebomb**, however, are aiming for a punk / rap / metal blend, and that's where they lost me.

I'm not that interested in heavy crust, and I guess that explains why I don't know **Link**, even though they have been around for over twenty years (shame on me!). They go for the more epic, atmospheric stuff. I dig the fast parts! Seems like they broke up this year. Their last release was a split with Geranium from France. It only has five songs on it total, so either the record is really short or the songs are really long. You can't be epic in ten seconds, so indeed the songs last like forever. No short, sharp shock. Still, listening to them makes me yearn for the good ol' days in La Zone.

Full Contact are saying they're not dead, but like with that guy from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, you just never know how much of a valid claim that is and how long you can keep it up. There's some people from **Sects Tape** playing in this band and it shows (which is good!). Their *Spit & Blood* is not brand new (2016), but that doesn't make it any less good. It has a cool version of Poison Idea's "Pure Hate," for those who care. Since some members from **Full Contact** formed **Pedigree**, I think the main focus now lies on the latter. **Pedigree** have their *Gifted Loser* free for download on their bandcamp. Cool! I just hope there also will be a release on vinyl. **Pedigree** sounds like a rawer version of **Sects Tape**, fucking good!

I don't like metal, I think it's fucking shit, but I'd like to mention **Toxic Shock** anyway as this thrashmetal / crossover band has been around for a long while and they've stayed true to the DIY scene. In 2017, they released their second album called *20 Last Century*. If you don't like their music, you can still buy their Toxic Socks (now there's a thought!).

Immigrants deliver their hardcore also with a metallic crunch, but also without the mindless macho stuff. This unit from Brussels has been around for a few years by now, but haven't released all that much. Nevertheless, they're worth your time.

Mostly Whites haven't released anything yet, but they have a few songs on their bandcamp. They sound a bit garage to me, but in a very good way. They claim Tjiengel tjangel music isn't just a genre, it's a way of life, and I have no idea what that means, but they're from Oostende and that really explains a lot! They've got the attitude right, now serve us some songs!

In a moment of total clarity, **Freddie and the Vangrails** admitted that they're no musicians. That hasn't stopped them from releasing an album packed with snotty punk rock. With songs like "Simba Is Full of Shit" or "Neo '60s Gestapo," they're not trying to be taken seriously, but succeed in being obnoxious, which is totally fine by me. This year they did a split EP with **Th' F'kk'n G'dd'mn Luckies**, a bunch of old timers who are not afraid to call themselves blues punk. Thank god it's more punk / garage than blues, and most songs are short and fast. There's only two guys in this band (guitar & drums), but that's still enough to blast your eardrums and empty your fridge.

The longest running punk band in Belgium still is the **Dirty Scums**. They go back all the way to the year of not our lord 1981. They still gig frequently and have a lot of releases, the latest being their *The Past is Back* CD (2017). Lyric-wise, they've lost their political vibe, but they still release their records themselves on their Dirty label. Back in the day, one of the **Scums** did a few scene reports for *MRR* (in 1984 and 1988). You can re-read them on their website. It's funny to

see how some of the bands mentioned back then are still around, like **Rene Biname**. Not as old as the **Dirty Scums** in terms of years, but ancient as it comes to looks. #discopunk, anarcho, frou frou. If that doesn't scare the living shit out of you, than the chanson bits will certainly do. They're quite unique. Check it out. They're going weird since 1988.

BAYACOMPUTER! are equally weird with their brand of soppy-synth-post-punk, but they're a relative new band hailing from Doornik. They sound a bit like a less snotty version of Pisse (Germany). It might be too synthy to make it in *MRR*, but I'd mention them anyway now that everyone drools over Total Control and gets away with it.

Chronic Disease decided to give it another go after 25 years of silence. They played a gig at Leperfest and plan to do some more. They released only one 7" back in the day, so maybe it's time for a discography?

Capital Scum were the premium Hageland Hardcore band in the '80s. They had a break and then reformed but haven't released anything since 2005, but they're still around. So what's Hageland hardcore? Well, it was a label run by Werner Excelmans and also a collective(?) that organized punk concert in the Scherpenheuvel / Zichem area. So it was named after a region in Belgium. Hageland Hardcore was crucial to the spreading of hardcore in Belgium, bringing bands like Suicidal Tendencies, Government Issue, Negazione, etc to a shitty city that was otherwise only known by Christian pilgrims (I kid you not). Werner stopped doing concerts in the late '80s, but resurfaced in 2016 to do a concert for his 50th birthday. **Heibel** did a one-off gig for that occasion, and while they looked a bit scruffy, they set the place on fire. Werner was encouraged by this concert and planned to do more, but sadly he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and passed away. Werner is fondly remembered in the scene and is sorely missed.

Zyklome A decided to do five concerts in celebration of 40 years of punk, but they sadly had to stop after two gigs because Markus, their singer, suffered from pain in his back and neck. What triggered Markus we will never know, but a bit later he took his own life. Again a tragic loss to the Belgian scene.

Another initiative to look back at 40 years of punk (in Antwerp) with a less disastrous outcome, was an expo organised by the Academy of Arts aptly named "Naughty Kids." While acknowledging that punk has been around for a few decades, the primary focus was on the past, with a cool display of records, t-shirts, fanzines, tapes, jackets, and old articles from the newspapers. There were some slideshows and interviews with **'T Vettig Front** and other people from the old scene concentrated around De Stadswaag. In a separate room, there was some live footage

Cocaine Piss

shown from the **Kids** (they also played there on the opening night). A debate on punk and what it means to the world nowadays was held on the last day of the expo. I missed out on that, arriving at what seemed to be the very last moment when some idiots were smashing chairs. I guess that after 40 years, some still are not getting the point. As much as I loved the expo, I felt a bit sad as it showed us the remnants of a bygone era. The level of activism in those days was so much higher, with bands, zines, flyers, demonstrations, and graffiti all over the place. Now people just bitch and moan on the internet. Turning rebellion into a discussion on Facebook. (Yeah, I sound like a jaded old fuck.)

A bit of nostalgia doesn't harm too much, I guess, but this 40th anniversary makes people do the weirdest things. Back in 1978, there was a two day punk contest held in Brussels with some twenty bands aiming for eternal glory and a record contract. Most of them excelled in amateurism and chaos, as can be heard on the legendary sampler named *First Belgian Punk Contest*. For some reason, there will be a second punk contest this year. And to make things even worse, some old timers are playing there again: **Mad Virgins**, **Raxola**, and **Ablasnieff Krugxzzz Groep** will give it another shot, next to a bunch of younger bands who are oddly enough not mentioned in this scene report. I leave it up to the curious themselves to find out more about it. With Google and its handy but not really reliable translate app, you'll do just fine. This thing just seems so irrelevant to me.

The **Kids** still gig like hell but decided not to venture into the unknown by releasing new, subpar stuff. **Raxola**, on the other hand, thought it was a great idea to write some new songs, and unless you're into Feargal Sharkey going slowrock you should avoid it like the plague. Check out their *Guts Out* trailer and weep.

As for venues, the **Pits** in Kortrijk has been around since forever. This pub is not exactly what you call spacious, but any self-respecting band who tours Europe plays there anyway. Over the years I saw Neon Piss, Criminal Code, Heratys, Piss Test, Youth Avoiders, Short Days, Hoax, etc. pass through there. You can dive straight from the bar on stage. And more than one person felt uncomfortable setting up their distro one meter away from the urinals (which happen to be in the same room), but it's a classic place to go.

Antwerp has turned out to be place to be, though, when it comes to underground concerts. The bigger concerts are being held in **Het Bos**, but gigs that draw a smaller crowd are usually in **Antwerp Music City**. This place is just a door in the wall and any first timer will agree that it's a bitch to find, but it's a fucking cool place. The fact that there's no stage only adds to the fun. **The City Is Dead** collective takes care of the punk / hardcore gigs.

Gent has a long tradition of squatting. At the moment, **Den Bristol** is the place where most DIY punk concerts are being held. **Dirty Pizza Booking**, Kim from **Black Heroin**, and **Wangedrag** take care of a lot of the shows down there. Apart from organizing gigs, the people of **Wangedrag** ("Misbehavior") also run a mail order, and they do a weekly (internet) radio show focused on raw hardcore punk and post-punk. They've got the finger on the pulse, serving us the best and the latest in DIY punk, so not just mindless worshiping of the past. They're about to release a compilation tape with the best of the current Belgian bands and a few classics from way back, so keep your eyes peeled.

I haven't been for a concert in Liege for ages (I guess ever since the Carlo Levi ceased to be), but **La Zone** still exists. It used to be the native habitat of the crust scene, but that sorta fizzled out after most of them caught cirrhosis or went for a haircut.

So that's about it. I've tried to be as comprehensive as possible, including bands I don't like that much as well, but even I draw the line somewhere so no macho / metal hardcore, straightedge, or that '90s pop punk thing. If your band is none of that but didn't get mentioned anyway, than it's most likely because I simply don't know you (but in one rare case because I really hate you). Nothing prevents you from writing your own scene report.

All pictures are taken by Nele Vandermaesen. I would like to express my eternal gratitude for letting me use them. You're the best! More of her pictures can be found on facebook at Nele Vermaesen Photography. Check it out!

Cheers,

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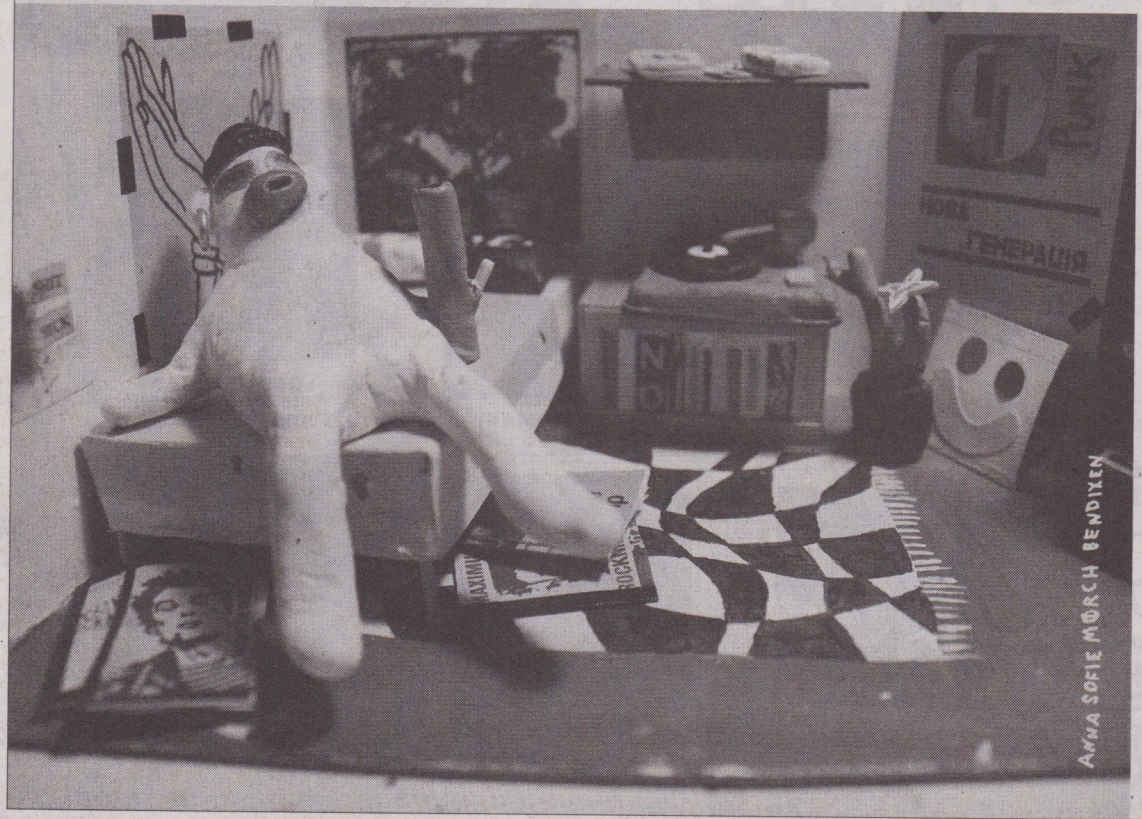

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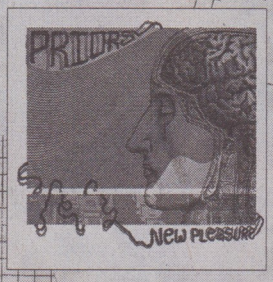

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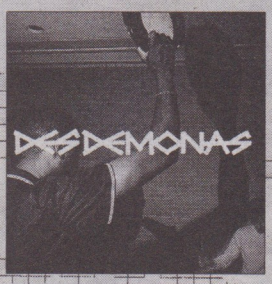

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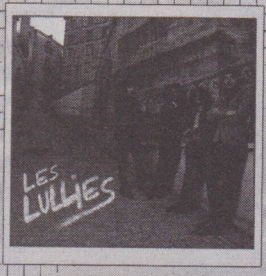

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YOUNG SKULLS
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Photos by Joshua Daniel Martinez.

Black and Brown Punk Fest:
Creating Space for Punks of Color in Texas!
By Daisy Salinas

Growing up a brown punk in the South was anything but easy. But I couldn't help but fall in love with punk. Everything about it excited me. Not just the aggressive music, mosh pits, mohawks, tattoos, and cut and paste zines and flyers, but its rebellious attitude—its non-conformist disobedience against authority and its feminist, African, and Indigenous roots.

But I also had my doubts. When I was twenty and living outside of Nashville, I was bullied by a group of older white punk men who called me a "scene slut" when throwing my first benefit for sexual assault survivors. White women took their side and they tried to drive me out a scene that I had helped create. I was completely broken. The punk scene is what I lived and breathed—it was my life. I became disillusioned with trying to fit into a music scene that claimed to be inclusive while also shaming women and being racist towards people of color. I almost gave up on punk altogether, and it took me a long time to realize the irony that punks of color have always played a huge part in the formation of punk but that we are not given credit for our contributions to punk subculture as much as white punks are. Our music, art, and DIY ethics are culturally appropriated by white folks who reduce our struggle to trends and profit off our art without crediting us, paying us, and without giving two shits about black, brown, and indigenous lives.

Having conversations with other punks of color made me realize that I was not alone. Jazzmin Readeaux and I joined forces in January of 2018 when we had a vision that a POC punk revolution in Texas needed to happen. Instead of waiting around to be included, we decided to join the DIY POC punk movement as a reminder that people of color are the backbone of punk and we refuse to have our contributions die in a white man's footnote. We don't need anyone's permission or

approval. Black and Brown Punk Fest TX is for the youth who were lost like me. I'm glad that my younger self didn't give up on punk and that I never stopped reclaiming it for myself and for my people.

Winter Wolf

Why a Black and Brown Punk Fest in Texas?

Jazzmin and I were really inspired by the several black and brown festivals that have sprung up around the country, including Chicago's Or Does it Explode: Black, Brown & Indigenous Crew (who started the first Black and Brown Punk Fest in 2012) and Oakland's The Multiverse is Illuminated among other non-corporate POC punk collectives and festivals, including NYC's No Flowers for Yt Powers, Philadelphia's Break Free Fest, Atlanta's Punk Black, and New Orleans's Deep Cuts Festival.

With the current political climate, we felt that Black and Brown Punk Fest is just as necessary in places like Texas because we lack safe spaces for marginalized artists to exist here. We are Black, brown, indigenous, woman, femme, queer, trans, and nonbinary, and we're not just on the coast! Punk and alternative people of color live everywhere—including the indigenous land of Tejas.

I used to be ashamed of being from Texas because of the conservatism, but then I realized that we don't represent the politicians in power. Making people of color feel bad for where we live is racist and classist. With the cost of living skyrocketing in the North and on the coasts, many of us can't afford to move and many of us that do end up homeless.

I am damn proud that we had a Black and Brown in Texas. Because we are decolonizing punk in Texas and all throughout the South—in cities, on the border, in basements, on ranches, on the gulf, and in the streets.

So what do we do in a state run by Ted Cruz and Greg Abbott, who just got fucking re-elected? We tear it down. Instead of asking for a seat at the table, punk has always been a way of flipping the table over, setting it on fire, and creating a new one. Black and Brown Punk Fest TX was our outlet to be able to do that.

Our Purpose

Black and Brown Punk Fest TX was hosted by Xingonas in the Pit, a San Antonio-based decolonial feminist punk collective aimed at celebrating artists of color that I started in March of 2018. We form part of a larger DIY movement geared towards building more inclusive spaces for punks and other alternative people of color.

The goal of Black and Brown Punk Fest TX is to unite punks of color across Texas. We want to build a safe space for punks of color to reclaim our identities, our art, and our collective liberation.

For Texas's first Black and Brown Punk Fest in 2018, we invited community from all corners of Texas and beyond to participate in punk subculture as something more than an aggressive and anti-authoritarian genre of rock music born in the '70s, but instead as a radical subculture that people of color have used as a tool to resist our oppression and build self-sufficient communities.

As far as representation, punk as a subculture is associated with the angry expressions of some of the most marginalized and displaced people in society, but it is primarily assumed to be white, male, and straight by default, especially in the US. This depiction is entirely false as punks of color, women, and queers have always played a huge part in the creation of punk on a worldwide basis.

Punk is associated with indigenous and Black subcultures that are rooted in self-sufficiency. Our DIY practices and even aesthetics have been culturally appropriated in punk culture—from mohawks to tattoos to piercings. Which makes our exclusion from punk spaces even more ironic.

We are the heart of all things punk and DIY. Black and Brown Punk Fest TX is about reclaiming the DIY roots of a subculture we helped create.

Because we are tired of white male dominated spaces that lack safety and inclusivity! Because we are not given credit for our contributions to punk and our work is culturally appropriated! Because in a time when the people in power are harming us, we need to build sustainable, creative communities where our voices and talents are heard and celebrated!

Who participated?

Our lineup absolutely killed it and included Chicana punk band Fea (San Antonio, TX), punk rock musical by Amalia Ortiz: *The Cancion Cannibal Cabaret* (San Antonio, TX), folkskramz act Ojos (Houston, TX), Black punk sister duo After Dinosaurs (Arlington, TX), anti-system Tejana punk act Frijolera Riot (San Antonio, TX), DJ and co-curator of the first BnB Donte Oxun (Houston, TX), folk punk band Mercutio and the Constantines (Houston, TX), pop punk singer / songwriter Esther Martinez (McAllen, TX), DJ Jeva (Austin, TX) and our special out of town guests: Harlem rhythm punx Winter Wolf (Harlem, NYC). Vendors included Joteria Cientifica zine, Linda Monsivais, Angela Mendoza, and Poetry on Demand by Rebecca Gonzales. Black and Brown Punk Fest TX was held October 20th, 2018 5pm-2am at La Botanica, a POC queer vegan venue in San Antonio, TX.

Getting Punk Artists of Color PAID!

I have been curating DIY music festivals for over eight years, but nothing has been as ambitious as Black and Brown Punk Fest TX. From the beginning, we set a precedent that one of our main goals would be to get artists of color PAID for our work as creators of culture. Because we are not corporate sponsored, we relied entirely on the support of the community to make this happen. We decided to launch a Gofundme to help raise funds for the festival.

Jazzmin and I successfully met our fundraising goal in only *two days*, and this was largely due to Ohio poet Hanif Abdurraqib, who generously donated $400 and encouraged his Twitter followers to donate as well. I went to sleep the night of the launch having raised around $100, and when I woke up late morning, the amount had changed to $1,200—by the end of the day we had reached $1,500. I cried that morning in joy and was in shock for days. The power of community is so fucking real, so I encourage anyone who is able to: please support projects by people of color because we do not always have the support we need—financially and otherwise—to bring our projects to fruition.

We fundraised a total of $3,000 to pull this off, including door proceeds. This could not have happened without the community, and we are truly grateful and blessed for the outpouring of love and support.

We were able to accomplish our goal of paying every artist. This is important to us because we as artists of color are long overdue recognition AND reparations.

As artists of color, it is not wrong to want to thrive—not just barely survive, which is what we have always known. We deserve to be paid for our art! Not only do we have to deal with racism, violence, tokenization, cultural appropriation, exploitation, and fetishism, but we are also expected to share our creative labor for free because "oh we're all punks and it shouldn't be about the money" or we should just be grateful that we were even included. Not compensating people of color for our creative labor is the definition of entitlement. We say fuck that shit!

Favorite moment?

All of the bands were revolutionary, but my favorite moment of Black and Brown Punk Fest TX had to be when the drummer of the Arlington, TX Black sister duo punk band After Dinosaurs came up to me and thanked me, explaining that out of all the shows she had ever played at, there had never been one that had been created specifically for her in mind. It was something really special that almost brought me to tears, and it made the months of organizing completely worth every second. Another favorite moment was seeing young teenage girls take up space and mosh at the front of the crowd during Chicana punk band Fea's set. Looking around, I imagined myself moshing at that age and how grateful I am to be able to create the spaces I needed when I was younger.

Frijolera Riot

Black and Brown Punk Fest as Resistance

Along with paying punk artists of color, it was also so fucking beautiful to build radical space with so many different artists of color. One of the only good things that comes out of the resurgence of white supremacy and fascism is our restored sense of artistic expression and collective power. The feeling of ecstatic energy in the moments when we are united and fighting back—that's something they can never take away!

We hope that the POC

punk movement will continue to grow across the country and around the world so if you're a person of color reading this who feels isolated in their scene, I encourage you to start your own!

And scenes and communities can look like so many different things—the possibilities are endless. So pick up an instrument, make a zine, grow food, write prisoners, fight gentrification, support sex workers, advocate for the marginalized, be a radical parent, dumpster dive, create art, do healing work, write, teach, stop a pipeline construction, dance, start your own scene, or scream your fucking head off!

Whatever it is we do, we must remember that the energy and passion we put into our work, our skills, our projects, and our activism is enough and is vital to our resistance and survival.

The oppressors in power can also never take our art, our sense of determination, our pride, and our unity. They can never take our fierce radical love we have for our people.

So support and love each other. Our capacities for loving one another and resisting the powers that be will only continue to grow.

My hope is that Black and Brown Punk Fest TX encouraged folks of the real inherent value and power they have—of what a real threat they are to the powers that be. That's why they want to commit cultural genocide against us and make us into self-loathing drones to serve the white elite. But we will dismantle their hateful plans and fight back like we always have!

I encourage anyone who reads this to take pride in yourself and honor your own uniqueness in the struggle. You are fire as fuck. You matter. You are not just on the sidelines. You run this shit. Keep the momentum going. Stay dangerous, brilliant, and tear it the fuck up, my punk fam. Remember another world is possible. Let's take care of each other so we can be dangerous together. Until then, I'll see you in the mosh pit!

The Cancion Cannibal Cabaret

Representation On and Off the Stage

"I never saw color in my punk scene before. We were all the same brown Mexicans and Latinx folks I knew for years. The touring pop punk bands that roll through our town are mostly white males. We've had the pleasure of hosting female fronted punk / hardcore bands, and there are woke promoters that make sure women of color are included on the bill. But as the years went by and I further developed my placement in the music scene as a lead singer, guitarist, organizer, activist, and advocate for my LGBTQIA community, I realized the importance of representation and what changes when you connect with someone that looks like you. One thing I noticed about my social media feed and the record labels I have on them was the lack of people that looked like and represented me. No queer folk and about one person of color per ten artists they promote every week. I realized the significance of representation as soon as I was asked to play for Texas's first ever Black and Brown Punk Festival. So when I took that first step into La Botanica in San Antonio, TX, I instantly felt proud and understood why this gathering was needed. I saw curly hair, brown skin and black punks in leather studded jackets. In Texas. It was glorious. On stage was the two-piece female

fronted hardcore folk band Ojos, tearing into our souls with songs about the gender norm and racism. They blew me away. Another band that got me in the feels was the two-piece sister collaboration called After Dinosaurs, from Arlington. The guitarist led us with her Marshall stack and white Gibson LP with the one P90, singing songs like 'Did You Just Assume Our Genre?' Explaining to us that just because she's black and at a club people assume she's there for hip-hop night. 'Nope, I'm in a punk band,' she answers dryly as she starts the song with guitar and her sister comes in with the beat. Being in the presence of the black and brown mothers, sisters, brothers, and friends resonated with my internal quest of acceptance. It further embedded in my soul the need for me to scream out and play my songs. This was my first festival as a solo acoustic musician. And it was one of the most proud and meaningful performances of my life. My audience was also black, brown, and queer folks. Nothing makes me happier than resonating with someone that can completely and totally relate to me, my story, and my skin. Just like I related to *The Cancion Cannibal Cabaret*, a punk rock musical written by Amalia Ortiz. When the cabaret sang over and over 'La frontera te llama' ('the border calls you') I listened. I listened to every note they sang, every bass riff and every bit of poetry that was being fed to me. Because I could relate to the fight, the anger, the fear and passion in the music. The four-hour drive home to McAllen, which sits a few miles from the border, was filled with those words and the faces of the people I connected with that day. It keeps me strong for the battle on our land as we're literally fighting an administration that wants to build a wall of hate in our backyard. As a Texan, a punk, and as a Queer Latinx musician, this festival showed me the importance of my voice and my representation on all levels. On and off the stage." **-Esther Martinez, McAllen, TX.**

"Black and Brown TX was something definitely needed in our community, and we are proud to be a part of it. Co-organizing and playing this fest was something we hold dear to our hearts. Giving other people of color a larger platform to showcase their talent is almost unheard of in Texas. Though we do have a large percentage of POC in our great state, we're often ignored. Thus the reason to hold this long standing tradition (which was started in Chicago by the amazing Monika Estrella and Donte Oxun) was necessary. Playing the fest in our home state was much different from being a part of similar events in other states. The crowd was refreshed and energized by seeing those who looked like them speaking freely without caution. Afterwards, many people who had not heard us before were telling us how important not only our message was but also that of the whole event. Realizations that they did not have to mold ourselves to fit into the white punk standard for at least one night was a well-deserved break for many attendees. It was a beautiful sight, and we wish to have another one not only next year but for many years to come." **-Jazzmin Readeaux and Joseph Xavier Rivera of folkskramz band Ojos, Houston, TX.**

"Black Olmecs were the first recorded civilization in what we call America today. Central America and what we call Mexico today were the heartbeat of ancient American life. The Olmecs' symbology of the jaguar was directly passed down to the ancient Inca, Maya, and Aztec civilizations. That's where black and brown people's history first intertwine. Black and brown indigenous aboriginal culture, not just music, are the building blocks of America. My experience as a black man is a unique one. I am a natural songwriter. I used to twist the melodies of '80s soul music and kick the tempo up, that was me as a kid. My dad used to tell me to stop humming. Everything is music to a kid from third Texas. I wanted to express myself and to release my pain through my guitar. I imagined a crowd of people screaming just for me. I used to think that was all I needed. In middle school, my second ever girlfriend introduced me to punk and metal music. I was drawn to the raw energetic rage of extreme music. When you fall down in the pit a stranger picks you up; that's the kind of love melanated people should have for each other. The

Fea

After Dinosaurs

bands just like us throughout the United States and come together for shows to educate and spread the message of unity, love, and education of where we come from. That's the problem with the US: the lack of tolerance and understanding of each other. We don't try to understand each others' stories. There's nothing wrong with knowing multiple languages. We don't need walls, we need understanding. Once we can accept that we are not all the same and learn about each other we can treat each other as equal. Hopefully this festival continues to grow here in San Antonio and throughout Texas. Much love to the Black and Brown Punk Fest!" **-Phanie D of Chicana punk band FEA, San Antonio, TX.**

raw unapologetic energy of punk rock should be the same as the melanated youth of the world. When a cop or any white person shoots one of our innocent brothers or sisters, they should be killed as well. At the festival in San Antonio I saw soldiers ready to fight systematic white supremacy with words and fists. I have a much better idea about what the punk shows I'll be organizing in Houston will look like. Can't wait for next year's Black and Brown Punk Fest!" **-Markell Gibson of folk punk band Mercutio & The Constantines, Houston, TX.**

"Performing at Black and Brown Punk Fest TX gave us the space we needed to unapologetically be ourselves. Now more than ever, we must create the spaces we need in order to express ourselves and lift each other up while we fight against this fascist regime. Frijolera Riot was born out of the constant rage we've been feeling this past year, and we were honored to be able to use the stage as a platform to ignite social change and cultural revolution. Surviving and thriving has always been part of our ancestors' existence. It's in our blood and we don't plan to stop now. We want to see black, brown, and native people everywhere united and claiming more radical space. For all of us living on the margins, punks, feminists, POC, immigrants, queer, trans, and nonbinary folks, Black and Brown Punk Fest TX was a political act of resistance." **-Daisy Salinas of Anti-System Tejana punk act Frijolera Riot, San Antonio, TX (@ frijolerariot)**

"It was an honor to be able to play the Black and Brown Punk Fest for the first time here in San Antonio. I believe the city already has a lot of culture, and to be able to bring people of color and different backgrounds through music is such a powerful and positive thing. Not only did we get to hear new bands we were not aware of, we can also network. Find other

"What stuck out for us in Black and Brown Punk Fest TX as attendees and vendors was how varied the lineup was. In geography, style, and color. Performers came from three corners of Texas and even some from Harlem, NY. Ojos, based in Houston, had such a different sound from the musical scene in the Río Grande Valley, TX, that we literally turned around as soon as we heard them. We enjoyed their whole set with changing instruments and deep lyrics that inspired us and truly connected with us. After Dinosaurs from Arlington, TX made us fucking dance to their fun set, especially their song 'You're Ugly for a White Boy.' It was also pleasantly surprising to be mostly surrounded by actual Black and Brown people. The venue was also very different from most bars in Texas; it was pet-friendly, exclusively vegan, and had a distinctly queer safe feel. For vending, set up and access was a breeze. We had a spot right next to the stage and we had food traffic throughout the night. We can't wait to come back for the next Black and Brown Punk Fest TX." **-Joteria Cientifica Zine, Rio Grande Valley, Texas. (@joteriacientifica, joteriacientifica@gmail.com)**

"My first venture into a mosh pit in 1990, I was hit square on the cheek by the back of a wrist. I let out a scream, and a giant man in a black moto jacket picked me up by the back of my neck like I was a puppy and delivered me to the safe perimeter. I have no doubt the blow was accidental, and I learned from the generous actions of the giant that the pit is not supposed to be abusive for the sake of abuse. Still, I am five feet nothing. Humans over 5'8" are giants to me. And as aggressive and tough as I really am, the pit is an enter-at-your-own-risk thrill ride I do not enter lightly. I didn't let my first experience stop me. I learned to hop landing on my toes in short bursts so that I never lose my footing and can recover quickly from the random body slam. I never lock my knees. At huge shows, I keep my arms locked in front of

me in case of a crowd surge so that I am ready to push back and maintain space to breathe. Most important, when I do get knocked to the floor, it is important for a tiny person like me to get up quickly lest I get trampled. There have always been hands extended to pull me up.

But the truth is, there has also been more than one occasion when I felt an angry grip on my ass or tits. In my twenties, I was a stage diver and crowd surfer. The most dangerous risk was not being supported by the crowd and hitting the concrete hard. But I'm small, so people were more willing to offer a toe hold step up above the crowd. I fell hard a few times, and once someone tried to steal my shoe as I was floating on a human wave. So what. The pain and aggression, I could deal with. The groping, however, was what forced me to finally stop. As I was passed overhead, hands would grab and squeeze deliberately humiliating. When I first heard Trump say the words 'Grab her by the pussy!' my mind immediately went to the mystery hands in the crowd poking, grabbing, and even punching me in the sacred yoni. This was no random accident considering how often it happened. I endured it. Still, I went back up aiming and landing kicks on douchebag heads. This pussy definitely fought back. I'd squeezed my legs together, gripping the groper with my thighs and twisting the fingers back hard with a free hand. I scratched and bit fingers reaching for my nipples.

At the time, I never realized it was assault. Each time, I reclaimed space for my body even through abuse. I belonged there too, and I was not going away.

All of these recollections focus on cisgender and don't even begin to address the LGBTQ+ experience or even all the racial issues surrounding a white, hetero male-dominated scene.

I came to punk at a time when I was not acknowledged or respected culturally and definitely not equal let alone safe in terms of gender. Only my love for the music kept me coming back, even though I was a disposable fan quite literally on the margins of the pit.

My first visit to Xingonas in the Pit was a revelation. Events such as the Black and Brown Punk Fest center the punk Other. It is also a multigenerational safe space where mothers, babies, teens, and toddlers come together in their love of punk. As a teacher, I felt comfortable inviting my underage students to the event where the strong, loving mujeres are in control.

I immediately recognized the Xingonas in the Pit audience as the perfect audience for my punk musical. Focused on the theme of revolution and inspired by current issues of social injustice, *The Canción Cannibal Cabaret* is a refugee, POC, feminist, LGBTQ+ call to action.

I chose the punk aesthetic for this show because the issues I tackle in my writing, such as racial injustice, gender inequality, and environmental justice, demand immediate action and outrage. Punk is never subtle or short on rage. At the same time, I explore the correlation of rasquachismo and the do-it-yourself nature of punk. Dr. Tomas Ybarra-Frausto calls rasquachismo a Chicanx sensibility born of necessity. Like punk, rasquachismo thumbs its nose at the ruling class and proudly creates something from nothing. Rasquachismo drives me to follow my sheroes in repurposing a historically white, male expression to radically re-envision it through the lens of intersectional feminism. In doing so, I attempt to give women of color permission to express themselves as loudly as white men.

My goals as an artist overlap with those of the Black and Brown Punk Fest in a way that I cannot imagine a stronger feeling of belonging than I did performing for that audience. The work that Daisy Salinas and other organizers are doing is important cultural work. The safe space created at the festival extends far beyond the date and place of the event. It is community building which allows for envisioning a brown, female future." **-Amalia Ortiz, The Canción Cannibal Cabaret, San Antonio, TX.**

Xingonas in the Pit is a San Antonio-based decolonial feminist punk collective aimed at celebrating artists of color. We are planning our next Black and Brown Punk Fest TX for the summer of 2019. In the meantime, we will continue to host quarterly punk fests as an act of resistance and self-sufficiency for people of color—including women, queer, trans, and nonbinary folks. If you are interested in joining the POC punk movement in Texas, feel free to contact xingonasinthepit@gmail.com and stay updated on our Instagram/Facebook at @xingonasinthepit

Credit:
Co-Organizers: Daisy Salinas and Jazzmin Readeaux
Flyer artist Diana Belén (@belendraws)
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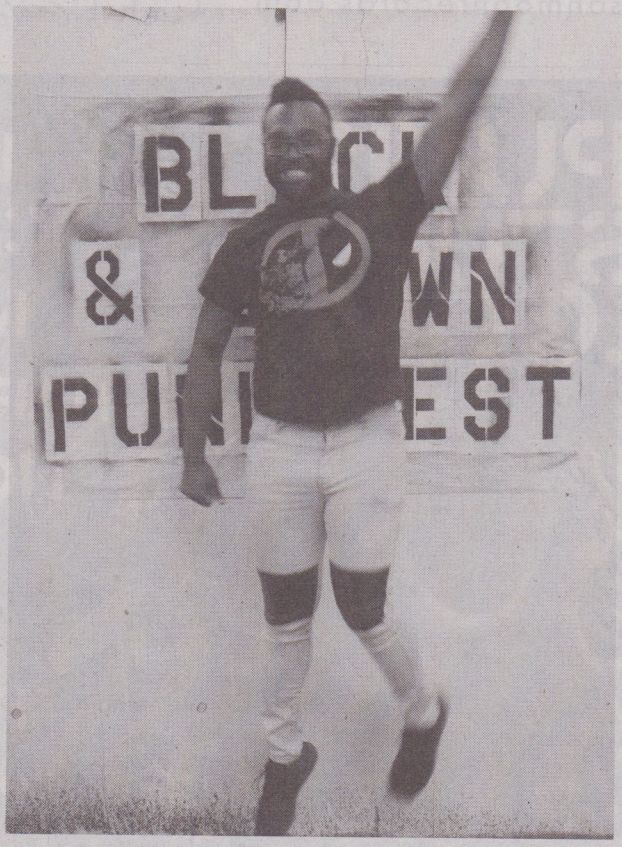

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SIAL

Interview and photos by
Martin Sorrondeguy

MRR: How did you all come to form the band?
Hafiz: We all played in hardcore and punk bands, so like, three of us were in punk bands and then we just decided to play something different; for a bigger audience, harder, and also to sing in our native language, which is Malay. Because Singapore is basically a majority Chinese, but Malay is the native in Singapore, and we are the minority race in Singapore.

MRR: Do many bands in Singapore sing in their native languages?
Hafiz: No, not really. I think that we are the only ones who fully sing in Malay.

MRR: OK, because most people there speak English.
Zafran: Yeah, in Singapore, our first language is English and our national language is Malay, but the majority are Chinese-speaking, Mandarin. For us, ethnically we are Malay, so we speak Malay with friends at home or something like that, basically.
Siti: There are like four official languages, like Tamil, for the Indians.

MRR: So I am curious and I think there may be other people that are curious, if English is the first language, when did English come to be, in the history of Singapore—
Sial: Of colonization history... *[laughter]*
Hafiz: Basically, Singapore was colonized in 1819 by the British. And then slowly it became a British colony until Singapore became fully independent in 1965.

MRR: We have issues in the US with different groups sometimes, this comes up; how does it play out in Singapore, or are communities just kind of co-existing? It would be hard to believe that English would be the dominant language. And what does that mean to you?
Hafiz: Basically, before colonization it was mostly Malays, natives who were living there, and when colonization came, they invited the Chinese, from China.
Zafran: And from India to trade because it was a geographically good trading location for all the traders to come. That's how it happened.
Hafiz: To me, a lot of us believe that colonizers are the ones who segregate the races, they are the ones who put each diverse group of communities in different places. That is how they separate everyone.

MRR: And how is it today? Are things cool?
Hafiz: We are the majority minority race. The Malay community is about 13% now. Then there is the Indian community and others. So the thing is, they tried to silence us, basically. They tried to erase our culture slowly through gentrification and all that.

MRR: So it is much harsher than gentrification.
Everyone: Yeah, yeah. *[laughter]*

MRR: Yeah, so they're not just trying to move you to another neighborhood. So Sial singing in Malay is that making statement in itself?
Hafiz: Yes, to us it is.

MRR: And how big is the punk scene in Singapore?
Hafiz: Singapore has a very unique punk scene. It is like, Malay is the minority in Singapore, but in the punk scene, it is like 95% Malay. *[laughter]*
Zafran: I guess that makes sense because of how punk is about oppression, how you are being segregated and silenced and everything; that is how punk started, and I guess that explains why 95% of the scene are Malays.
Hafiz: I think a marginalized type of group is more attracted to alternative culture.

MRR: Wow, that's interesting. That's pretty fascinating. I am just curious, how within the punk scene and the Malay punk scene, has anyone been like, "Why are you singing in Malay?" Or has everyone been, like, "cool, do it!"?
Hafiz: No, nah, everyone has been cool. I think because it is not common, so I think people try to accept it.

MRR: That's great! Talk to me a little about the punk scene in Singapore.
Everyone: Oooh. *[laughter]*

MRR: When would say it really started taking ground in Singapore? What are some of the old bands from Singapore?
Hafiz: I think, like during the '80s, basically, everywhere in Southeast Asia, but I mean, the first punk scene started in the Philippines. And then in Malaysia and Singapore it was influenced by people listening to John Peel because they were on BBC Radio, and in Malaysia and Singapore they still have BBC radio. So in the Philippines it was influenced by American hardcore.
Siti: Because they were being colonized by Americans.
Zafran: Who were in the military coming to the Philippines.
Hafiz: So in Malaysia and Singapore it came there a little, but it was more UK punk. The older bands, if people know it, there was this band called Opposition Party.

MRR: Yeah, I have their 7". Was that the first 7" to come out from a band from Singapore?
Hafiz: Yeah, the "Brain Fucked" 7". Yeah, yeah, that is the first 7" coming out from Singapore. And then, back then because it was always influenced by like people listening to metal or crossover, then people start to separate, like, "OK, I want to listen to crossover thrash, but I like the more punk side of thrash," and then some people were like, "I'm more attracted to the metal side of crossover thrash." And then hardcore, because of pen pals and stuff, there was like the whole New York hardcore thing in the late '80s, and there was this band called Stompin' Ground, and things just started to happen from there.

MRR: OK, so today who are some of the really cool bands in Singapore that you like? Everybody has different tastes, so...
Zad: There is a cool band called Urgent Matter.
Hafiz: I play in a band called Lubricant, and we've been touring a lot. And Lifelock, this band, they play like Discharge, Disclose, Disaster. And they play really, really good. I think they're like one of the best Discharge-influenced bands. And there's also younger bands. A lot of younger hardcore bands.

MRR: And what bands are you into now, from anywhere? I see you have an Exit Order shirt on.

Zafran: Yeah, it is one of my favorites.

Zad: Yeah, I think more from La Vida Es Un Mus.

MRR: Well, let's bring up La Vida Es Un Mus seeing you have a new record. It just came out, right? How did that all happen?

Zafran: Because I run a distro label and shop, I deal a lot with Paco *[from La Vida Es Un Mus]*.

MRR: What's the name of your shop?

Zafran: Surface Noise. It's a hardcore punk record store. Before that, when I did my distro, I did a lot of trades and bought wholesale

from him. So we often talked about him coming over because I think he's only been to Thailand, the furthest he has been in Southeast Asia, so he plans to come over to Singapore, but it hasn't happened yet. We talked a lot, and when we got together as a band we started recording and everything, and I just sent him some MP3s and I was like, "Hey, we recorded this, do you want to release it?" When we sent it, he previously released the mini LP. He liked it, and after that, straight away things started to go smoothly. We got the templates, started doing all the artwork within like one week or something like that. It was very fast.

MRR: Are you happy with it?
Zafran: Yes, we are very happy with it because we know the distribution from La Vida to all the other distros or record stores is very good!

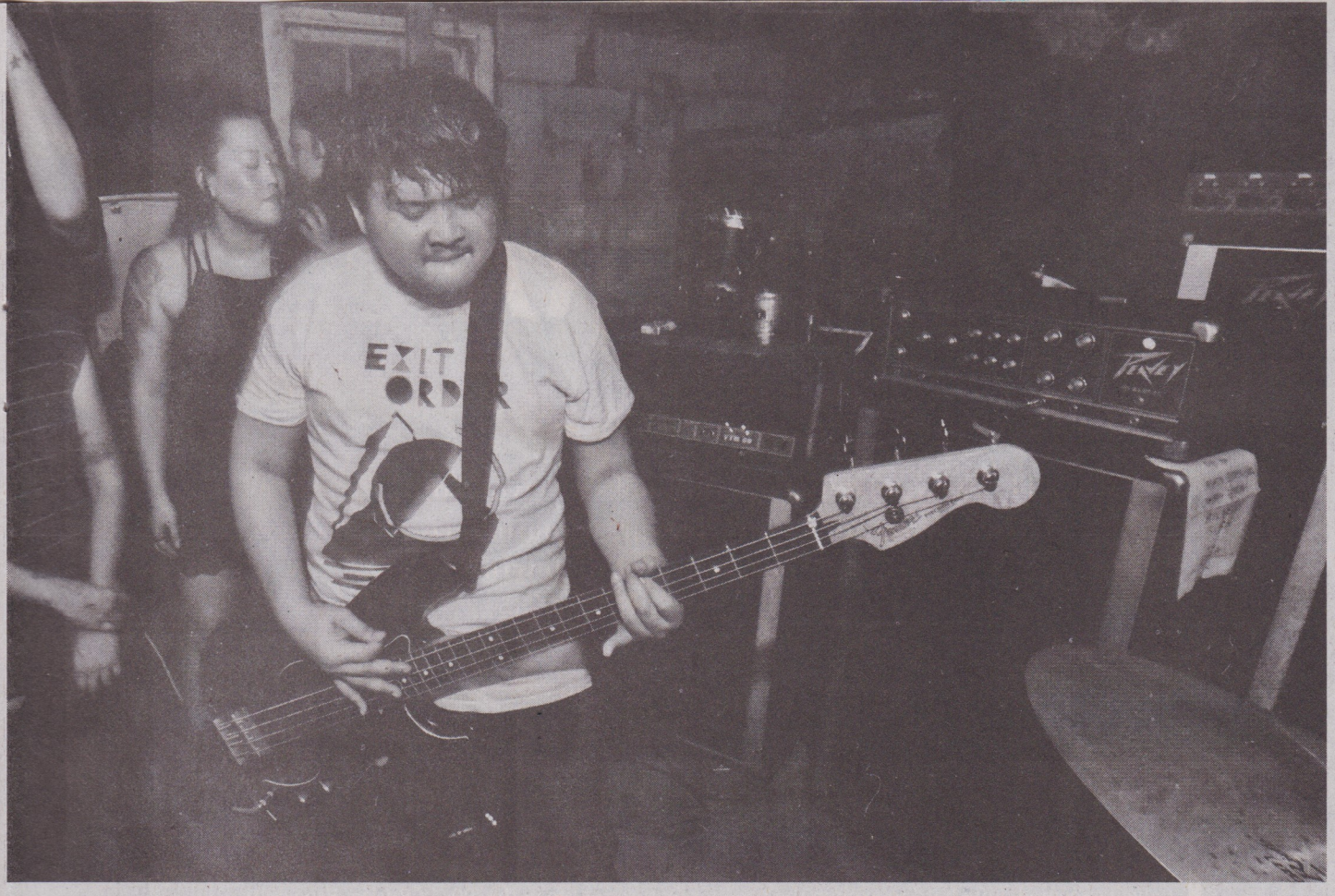
MRR: What is Sial about in terms of lyrics? What are you doing with the band? I guess you're the lyric writer, Siti, what are the songs about or what do you want to do with the band?
Siti: Not only me, but Zad is also the lyric writer. Basically, the lyrics are about experiences that are coming from a country where it is supposed to be diverse but actually experiencing racial hatred I guess? It's about...erm...what's that word?
[Sial speaks in Malay, trying to figure out what word Siti is trying to say]
Siti: It's like people don't realize that it's still happening? You know how people think at the surface, "It's all cool," but actually deep down it's even more...
Hafiz: It's more like a facade. Singapore is very good at that.
Thaib: We also face similar institutionalized racism, like through our textbooks...
Siti: So basically, there is no constitutional freedom in Singapore at all. This is one of the ways, for me, I guess, on how I can put it all into a medium like song lyrics.
Hafiz: Everything in Malay is more badass, I think. [laughter]. English is quite simple, sometimes. Like the vocabulary is just there, but in our language we can express things better, I think.
Zad: More interesting and angrier words.
Thaib: I feel like older folks always say that Malay is a very soft-spoken language, but I personally feel like Singaporean-Malay language is amongst the crudest in Southeast Asia. *[laughter]*
Hafiz: Yeah, but the Malay language is like ethnically supposed to be soft-spoken, and that's a lie. That's why when the colonizers came over, they were like, "Oh, OK, hello, welcome white people, thank you, thank you." *[laughter]*
Thaib: And give our land for how much? Like $60 or some shit, I don't know. *[laughter]*
Hafiz: And this band is about fighting back, yeah, like decolonizing.

MRR: Is there any particular song that you really are like, "this is the song I feel super passionately about?"
Siti: "Leta"! That's my favorite song. I used to work in a bicycle shop, and my employers are actually from Russia, and they're like really, really privileged. You know, they come here, open up a shop, and all that, but the thing is I think it is what local Singaporeans face also, when you have a white person opening a shop and they expect you to make all the things, and like we're down here suffering and you don't know what we're going through. So that's what the lyrics were actually inspired by and what I was facing when I was working there.

MRR: The song is actually titled "Leta," which means?
Siti: Leta means, what's that word? Despicable.

MRR: So what are you all expecting from this tour? You're playing Chicago, Cleveland, Philly, where else? New York, Boston, Montreal and then Toronto. So what are you expecting? This is the first time for all of you being here. What are you hoping for? What do you want to see? What did you come with, what idea? I am curious.
Zafran: I don't want to expect anything [laughter] because when you have high expectations and then something happens, it's like too much to handle. So...nothing!
Zad: Yeah, no expectation. *[laughter]*
Hafiz: Yeah, we just want to play music that white people don't understand. Like, "Fuck you all, these songs are about you." *[laughter]*

MRR: It is interesting because like you will see tonight, the punk scene is pretty mixed. We have a lot of Latinos here, you get a lot of different stuff, and you're going to see that everywhere. So I think you're going to have some really good conversations with people here. I think what you're explaining and describing, a lot of people can relate to in different ways.
Thaib: Yeah, a lot of Asians have been hitting me up too, asking for the address, people I've never seen, never met. And they are all, you know, East Asian, Southeast Asian...
Hafiz: And that's what the band is also for. It's not just about us, it's about the marginalized community that's going through this. It's the same fight.



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CHIMERA

"The flowers dried up, the socks are worn out,
After love's gone, only dreams remain here,
Thursday, July, been patient with winter,
But did not come alive until spring..."

—Chimera, "Voroni" (Crowes)

It always seemed quite hard to explain the peculiar features of life in the '90s in Russia. Especially for those people who never lived there, never felt themselves excited with the mystery word "perestroika." "Perestroika" meant "changes." After Gorbachev became president of the USSR, everyone understood that the socio-political situation started to change. And as it's usually said in literature: clouds gathered. The 1990s were the best time for Russian rock'n'roll. Destroying freedom and mysterious changes became the stimuli for numerous rock bands starting their creativity in late '80s to develop their skills, continuing playing shows, even though the air was pretty much polluted with chords of danger, uncertainty. In the 1990s, such bands as Akvarium, DDT, Alisa, and Kino had already became the symbols of rebellious urge for self-determination, separating the representatives of the old generation from the new. After the falling of the Iron Curtain, this task became much harder to do.

After leaving Akvarium and touring through the world, Seva Gakkel returned to St. Petersburg hopeful to, as he later said to me, "create a precedent." Seva's role in alternative music in Russia is quite important, first of all because of TaMtAm. Under the control of the man who had spent hours in New York hanging out with David Byrne and the members of Sonic Youth, visiting local clubs and of course CBGB's, the Soviet youth center later became the first Russian independent rock club. For those readers who have never been in the USSR, I must make one more note. You must understand that Russia in the 1990s was tabula rasa, and Seva Gakkel became Hilly Kristal for all the further generations. TaMtAm became not only the place where bands could play, but something more. For some of them it was just a stage, for others it was a squat, where young people could hide from the other world. The world that was changing in some unknown ways. And of course it was home for many of the musicians. TaMtAm became the place where such bands as Tequilajazzz and Kohol i Shut, Avtomaticheskie udovletvoriteli and Auktyon, NAIVE and Military Jane (later called Pilot) started their careers. The place that served as the stage for MDC during their Russian tour of '94. The place visited by David Byrne. And of course the home of Chimera. They were the brightest of all of them. Enormous energy. Unmixable elements fighting with each other, under the control of Eduart "Radt" Starkov—lead singer and the guitarist of the band. Friends lovely called him "Edick," a nickname similar to the English "Eddie." But for most of the visitors of the club, he became the most unique person: an incredible poet and the soul of Chimera.

Kino was the first band who sang about changes in the period of perestroika. Their "Peremeni" ("Changes") sounded so powerful and furious, so the lines "Mi hotim peremen!" ("We want changes!") written by Viktor Tsoi became the real refrain for that time. Later on, after Tsoi's death in 1990, these changes had happened, and the new epoch was followed by frightening uncertainty. It was the time of recent changes and the time when Gennadiy Bachinskiy decided to create a band. That's how Chimera was born. It's very hard to imagine a better place for a young band than a rock club like TaMtAm was. At that time, it was the first and only rock club in the city. Chimera's music itself was quite unusual—from the beginning, it was clearly hardcore. It sounded like the time it arose from. The time of change, the time of people's rage. But later on, Markscheider Kunst and Messer für Frau Müller radically changed their sound. With it, Chimera also changed. Gennadiy changed his role, becoming the band's manager, and Radt found the right pedalboard. They began to mix screaming chords, melancholy tones, the avant-garde, and the same hardcore they wanted to play. It was something more than unusual. Something unique. A psycho-theosophical rollercoaster trip akin to Frank Zappa listening to free-jazz chords. Ian Mackaye loudly covering Arthur Brown's "Fire."

But none of them fully reminds one of Edick. It's quite common to describe artists like "He was special!" But in this case, I'd rather say there won't be another Edick Starkov, just as there won't be another Steve Albini or H.R. Radt was also a very specific kind of personality. Each time I listened to Chimera, I'd wonder about these recent changes. Radt's music could be soft but also heavy and catchy. He always tried to make each of the gigs unique. He would cook dishes on the stage, drawing with his own blood, but at the same time still being a wonderful musician and poet.

Pavel Labutin, cello

MRR: Outside of Chimera, Eduard and you also played in the band Egazeba. According to him, it was quite a chaotic project. Can you tell me a few words about it? How was it formed?
I've always been interested in improvised music. When musicians don't really have rehearsals or don't discuss what they would play. Of course, there is always some doubt. Like "Can we make this work?" But if you can, it's something special. And you'll get a rush from it! How it was formed? There were some back rooms in TaMtAm being used by various musicians for rehearsals. Some of them lived there, and of course sometimes we were tempted to play together.

MRR: Eduard has said that there were some cases when something wasn't released just because of some circumstances. Was there a lot of that?
Almost always, we had a feeling that our recordings didn't transport the energy of live gigs. As for the musicians, and as for our audience.

MRR: At the beginning of your career, you worked together in Deputat Baltiki ("Baltic Deputy"). How did it become Chimera? Edick always wanted to play harder music. Then he found the right pedalboard. And after that, Gena left the band, just working as our manager.

MRR: The band was formed by Gennadiy Bachinskiy who played guitar when all of you started to work together. What can you say about his role in the band before and after his departure?
His role was quite important for all of us. He organized our gigs, tours, and recordings. But the main thing that he was the person put us together as Deputat Baltiki. We wouldn't have met without him!

MRR: Seva Gakkel said that as a cellist you brought something personal to the music of Chimera. A new element. Were these new things just affected by your background, or did Edick as your frontman also have a part in it?
I think both of these things. And probably all of us would say such a thing about their manner of playing.

MRR: The music of Chimera is quite varied. You have lots of heavy-sounding songs, as well as soft and lyrical. Sometimes both of these things react together, as in your song "Zimniy Sindrom" ("Winter Syndrome"). How did Eduard try to create his songs?
I think all of us tried to create the music following Edick's lead. And as well, making it varied and different.

MRR: And what about performances? Edick always made your gigs a bit unusual, ranging from cooking fried eggs on stage to the gig when he pulled some blood out of his vein and started to paint a picture with it. How did you perceive it?
I didn't take part in the gig with blood painting—I was out of town. After this, I don't think that I was as shocked by the rest of performances. Though being on stage, I didn't see the whole picture. And of course Edick didn't tell us about his plans before the shows.

Vladislav "Vitus" Victorov, drums

MRR: As far as I know, Chimera took a part in composing the arrangement and performing the written material for one of Brecht's plays. How hard it was for you to "turn off" of your usual material?
It wasn't something hard. The stage director asked us to do what we usually do despite the concert taking place in a theater. It was interesting experience for us. But after some time, it bored us, so we recorded a few tracks in the studio of the theater, which were later used as a soundtrack for the play without our participation.

MRR: The members of Chimera were slightly different individuals. You were in contact quite rarely. But when you got on stage... some chemistry happened. What was the reason for this?
I think during our rehearsals and gigs Radt was such a uniting person, for all of us. With this energy in his music and lyrics. He brought his musical "blank" to our rehearsals. It was the point of entry for our creativity! There weren't any borders. Everyone improvised as he wished. And then, when we found some piece of music, a fragment we liked, we just noticed it...we energized each other! Without it, our music would have been senseless.

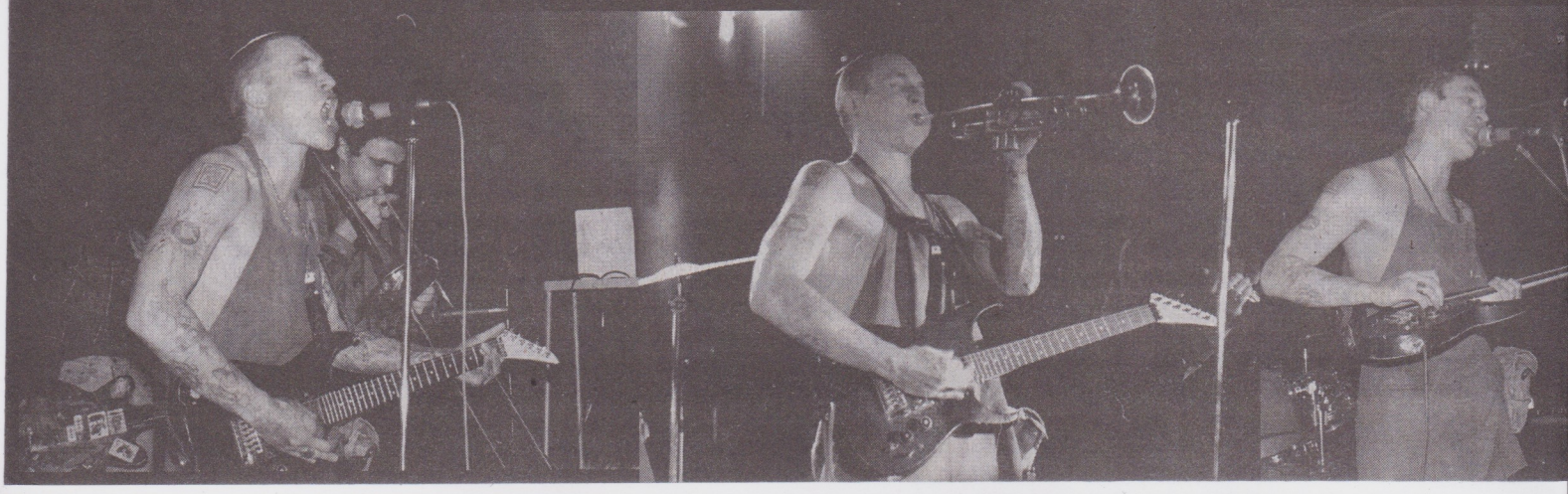
MRR: Seva Gakkel founded taMtAm following the chamber-like atmosphere of such clubs like CBGB's. Can you say that you were satisfied with the format you had in TaMtAm?
Personally for me, the format of TaMtAm was stroke of genius for different young bands of the '90s! Lots of musicians had their concert venues with excellent equipment and sound. And of course, the atmosphere of the club was quite similar to the music we were playing there. But for Chimera, TaMtAm became our rehearsal space. So we were satisfied with the format...and I still remember these days with great nostalgia, thinking about TaMtAm and all the things that happened there!

MRR: Can you tell me a little bit about how you came to the band? How did it happen, and was it hard for you to find common language with the guys?
I came to the band when it was called Deputat Baltiki and Crocopluch. The members were the same, except different vocalists. In Deputat Baltiki it was Radt, in Crocopluch there was guy with nickname "Pluha." And at some point Deputat Baltiki became Chimera, and with it, the music of the band changed a little bit. It wasn't hard for me, because there were the same musicians I had been playing with. They just changed their manner of playing. So everything that happened with Deputat Baltiki became the result of a certain musical evolution.

MRR: But again, you didn't quite know each other. Only your rehearsals and gigs united you. So how you did you create your music, and can you say that as a musicians you had some... common understanding?
Yes, it's right that we were more acquaintances than good friends. But usually this process started with Edick—he tried to convey to us his ideas, then we started working on the songs. We would improvise until all of us felt this "product" was finished. We highlighted these forms and played them live.

MRR: What attracted you to the band, and to working with these people?
I met the band for the first time, after their invitation for me to become a member of Deputat Baltiki. I agreed just out of curiosity. At the time when Deputat Baltiki changed its name, we had been playing for a few years already. I liked what we were doing, playing, and of course, I continued playing with the guys, under the different name. Originally, it was a simple interest—to try something new.

MRR: There were lots of different radical changes in the country in that period. And of course we can say that the fall of Iron Curtain affected the atmosphere in St. Petersburg and Chimera in particular. In Deputat Baltiki, you had quite a lot of lyrics about disagreement, while in Chimera the majority of your lyrics were kind of romantic songs. Did you evolve as a band into this stage, or was it always was present in your creations?
After some time, our lyrics evolved. It was one of the key features of Chimera—this sense of revolution had been always present in our music more than in the lyrics. And the music became more meaningful and filled with it then our words. So we always had this revolution in our music. It just changed, passing through different stages of the evolution.



Chimera remained the brightest band of TaMtAm's community until the end of club's history. During the early '90s, the band recorded numerous gigs on cassettes—"'93 Live In Moscow, TaMtAm & Other Places," "Live '94."

In April of 1996, TaMtAm was officially closed. In the age of privatization, people just couldn't stand such a massive anarchy-type generator in the center of the old capital of Russia. Chimera didn't stop their creativity. And Seva Gakkel became band's manager.

Seva Gakkel: I didn't really expend my energy into the producing process. Of course I was an authority, I had some volatile connections with the world of money. The means I had were enough only to record the album *Zudwa*. With this, I realized that the band couldn't ever reach the level of popularity that later bands like Korol I Shut ("King and the Jester") would have I only hoped to increase the number of their fans and expand their touring geography without sacrificing my principles.

Edick died by suicide in 1997 during the recording sessions of the band's last and greatest album, *ZUDWA*.

Seva Gakkel: It's quite hard for me to talk about Chimera as a phenomenon, or the cultural value of their creativity. All my thoughts are limited to everyday concepts. I don't think that the '90s were different, a more special or harder time to live in, than times before and after. It's quite hard to survive for such bands like Chimera, and Edick especially, in every era. I'm happy to have known a great number of musicians from different generations. And I'm happy to be a bystander, and of course Chimera was the nearest to me. But after Edick's death I had a kind of breakdown. Although I'm still working in this sphere, my functions have a mechanical character. I don't take an ideological responsibility, I have no emotional involvement, and now I'm practically unresponsive. The era of rock'n'roll for me is over.

After Edick's death, Seva Gakkel released *ZUDWA* by himself—a fully DIY release. With it, Seva gave the push to one more generation—for those people who listened to Chimera in TaMtAm, for those who saw Edick on stage. And there's no question whether there will be another band like this. I definitely know that no. There won't be a club like TaMtAm was. There won't be a time like it was back in the 1990s. There won't be more musicians like Chimera were. And there will never be another person like Radt.

Text and interviews by Danil "Dan" Volohov

Photos by Anatoliy Antonov

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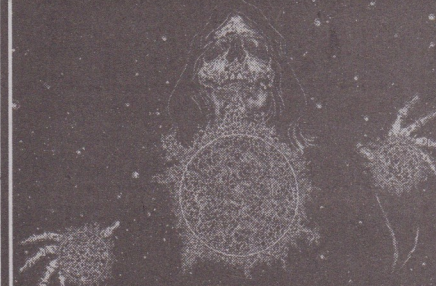

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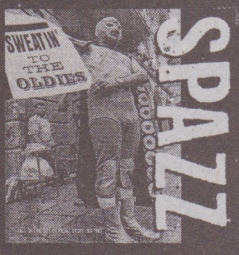

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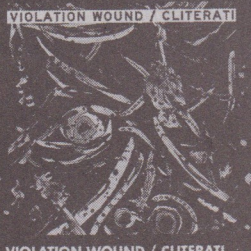

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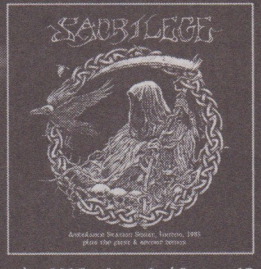

Sacrilege - *Ambulance Station Squat, London 1985 + 1st & 2nd Demos* - LP

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Since 2010, Scavenger of Death Records has promoted punk and hardcore music from their hometown of Atlanta, GA.

In spite of shoestring budgets and perennial incompetence, label co-founders Ryan Bell and Greg King have managed to bring over 30 releases into the world, proving to punk enthusiasts from Moscow to Melbourne that Atlanta has more to offer than a busy airport and the World of Coke. Here they complain about everything under the sun.

Interview by Ruby Rubenstein.
Photos by Greg King and Ryan Bell.

MRR: Why did you start the label?

Greg: At the time, there were a few cool young bands operating in Atlanta that almost certainly would've gone undocumented had we not stepped in and started the label (Ralph specifically). The label also functioned as a not so subtle outlet for our vanity projects, Ryan Dinosaur and GG King.

Ryan: Ralph started it all, though. Ralph was a great hardcore band that kinda had their own thing going on. To me, they were like Boston Not L.A. meets Amde Peterson's Army.

Greg and I were working together at a pizza place. I had recorded seven tracks for a Ralph 7" that was supposed to come out on Rob's House Records. I was supposed to send the label the files, and apparently I never did. Months later, the band was worried the record wouldn't come out, and I figured why not do it ourselves? Both of us had put out records before on one-off labels. We went back and forth on label names for like a week at work. The label was almost called Intestinal Anxiety until I remembered my Bobby Soxx.

Apparently Rob's House Records was completely willing to do the record. We were all worried that the label thought Ralph was too hardcore. In my defense, Ralph would have been the most cacophonous release in that label's history. But the reason was simply that I never sent the email, I had accidentally saved it to a draft instead of sending it. My apologies to Trey of Rob's House.

MRR: How did the *Land of Nod* LP come together?
Greg: Regional punk / hardcore comps seemed to be a dying breed, and we had a pretty exciting crop of bands developing at the time, so we decided to throw our hat in the ring. Ryan had a bunch of unused tracks from bands like Predator, Ralph, and Manic, so we just built it from there.
Ryan: I had read about how the *Process of Elimination* comp tracks were recorded on the same day, which is how Barry Henssler did background vocals on the Fix track "No Idols." I thought that method would create a very focused snapshot of the scene. Plus at that point I didn't have a lot of recording gear and had to borrow almost everything, so it made sense to knock everything out at the same time. So we set up in Clay Kilbourne's basement—Clay played guitar in GG King. Greg brought a grill and cooked while I recorded. I think COPS and Shaved Christ tracked records that day, too.

MRR: The GG King LPs in particular are very involved and elaborate. Was that the idea from the beginning?
Greg: GG King as a band started pretty haphazardly. The first few singles were mostly unused material from the Carbonas as well as other odds and ends. By the time I was ready to start making an album it had developed into something entirely of its own. I personally enjoy getting an album where there is a lot to take in both musically and visually. You've got the opportunity to transport people into a world of your own making, so why not take it.
Ryan: I think the fact that the LPs were both recorded in many sessions over a span of time adds to the sense of world-building. It's a collage instead of a single image.

MRR: I've heard that Predator's *The Complete Earth* was sort of willed into existence by the Atlanta scene. What happened?
Greg: I guess what you're referring to is the almost constant state of fizzling out that Predator has always existed in. Most of the tracks for that album were recorded for what was meant to be a posthumous cassette-only release, but at the insistence of label bosses Ryan and Josh Feigert of State Laughter Records, Predator grudgingly persisted and it became a second album over the course of a couple of years. As I type this, after a year or so of inactivity, Predator is preparing to play a Monday night local show to what is likely going to be a small handful of people. What's the expression? Non career-movers.
Ryan: It was more than just Josh and I that wanted the tracks to come out. I endured many exhausting conversations about it in the wee hours at the bar. Predator had taken a direction into a darker, harder sound that really encapsulated what was happening at the time in Atlanta. The party was over: Carbonas, Beat Beat Beat, Baby Shakes, etc. were dead or gone. People weren't boppin' to the beat as often because the bands had a mean edge. That's what *Land of Nod* captured along with *The Complete Earth*. Greg had joined the band on drums, so we recorded that one in his living room, just like many of the early SOD releases. When I put the State Laughter logo on the back of the record jacket, I put it on there sideways. Sorry Josh!

MRR: How has the Atlanta scene changed since *Land of Nod*?
Greg: If most of the bands from Land of Nod don't exist anymore, I would say most of the same people have formed new bands in their wake. We could probably do a second volume with local killers like Uniform, Nurse, Hyena, Caesium Mine, Mutual Jerk, Wash, Nag, etc.
Ryan: If anything, these bands have continued the trajectory that was evident on *Land of Nod*. Their ideas are more expansive and even further away from the punk party that existed ten years ago. I don't mean to sound dismissive of those earlier bands. I am a Carbonas superfan, and the Frantic put out the

most underrated record Atlanta has seen. My point is simply that the tone of the Atlanta punk scene I know has changed en masse.

MRR: What is the label's place locally? What is the label's place in a wider sense? How has that changed since the time of *Land of Nod*?

Ryan: I think that while the people who played on *Land of Nod* are still making great music, there is a crop of new bands that have since developed. I don't know that we've really gone after these bands full tilt. I blame the fact that for the past two years we've both had to be at work before 7 AM. In a wider sense, I think we stumble on in the same level of relative anonymity we've always known. We don't release records often enough to stay on the radar, or so the analytics tell me.

MRR: What is SOD's niche?

Greg: Self-deprecating parody core and mystical thrash / rap.

Ryan: Steadily declining sales. But seriously, we're the best Atlanta-only hardcore / punk label that is, was, or ever will be. It's a low bar.

MRR: On your first release (the self-titled Ralph EP) you wrote the words "cheap not mysterious" on the sleeve. What does that mean? Do you think you have lived up to your motto?

Greg: "Cheap not mysterious" was meant to explain our lack of packaging with a subtle ribbing of the goofy punk trend known as "mysterious guy hardcore." We have more than lived up to this motto, I think.

Ryan: We've never been mysterious, at least.

MRR: Why run a label? It seems like a lot of work.

Ryan: I can't explain why we kept at it. We bought ourselves a few Darkthrone reissues back in 2012 with some profits, but otherwise the label has just sucked away our time and money. Usually the case is that one of us sees a band live and hears a great song and imagines that it would sound good on a record. That's enough reason to put out a record.

MRR: Are you trying to make a cultural or musical statement with your label?

Ryan: I don't think so. Most of what has happened—good or bad—has been accidental.

MRR: What role does legacy play in the creation of the label?

Ryan: I want any children I bring into this world to have all the ammunition they need to completely delegitimize my existence.

MRR: Does your label have a guiding aesthetic?

Greg: Cheap not mysterious?

Ryan: I am colorblind, so black-and-white has always appealed to me. Whenever I choose colors, I choose wrong (see: Ryan Dinosaur 7").

MRR: What's the most frustrating part of running a label?

Ryan: Getting artwork from bands. In every way this is the most annoying part.

Bands never read my instructions. I'll tell them the artwork must be black and white, or that is must be photocopied onto dust sleeves I bought in bulk. After they've agreed to those terms (which are always set for budgetary reasons) they wait until two months after art was due to want to change everything. I've already bought the supplies I need—toner, custom stamps, paper, stickers, etc.—and their records have been sitting under my coffee table for a few weeks. Now I'm

broke, frustrated, and unable to stretch my feet under the table when I watch TV. Or they send me some shit drawn in pencil on a napkin and then get confused when the finished product looks like a photocopy of a napkin covered in pencil doodles. I may have mentioned, but I am fairly color blind, so I am more comfortable working with black and white because I know I can trust my eyes.

Compiling the booklet for the *Land of Nod* compilation was the most frustrating part of running this label. We had to hound the bands for art, and often what we got was pixelated, or an iPhone photo of a drawing, or the wrong dimensions. Acid Freaks gave us two different tossed-off pieces of art. I didn't like them and Greg hated them. My wife Mattie ended up making their page, and it looks awesome. I know Brannon, the singer, stands by his art, but if laid-back, laissez-faire Greg vetoed it, you know it was bad in the wrong ways. Dealing with these issues didn't give us time to stop and appreciate the great art we got from bands like Manic and Ralph.

Often bands just don't have an idea, so Greg or I have to make something, often with a photocopier. I usually enjoy doing this, but I'm not always great at knowing my audience. I was recently told of a cover I designed, "I've seen worse punk art." It was meant as a compliment. As a former high school English teacher, I recoiled at the low expectations set for my by this person, but at the same time, at least it wasn't negative. The label I sent it to absolutely hated it and refused to put it on the cover. So I see both sides of the situation.

MRR: Do you feel pressure to keep your prices low?
Ryan: I used to, but I think it's because I undervalued our label. I still price things competitively, but the extra money coming back allows me to put out records more often. I still don't know how anyone makes money on 7"s.

The label money generally stays in the label. On the road, we'll buy food or gas with label cash. But like most labels our size, we're just trying to fund the next release, and if charging $15 retail for a record means I can do that, then I will.

Even recording or mixing records myself, and printing whatever I can at home, it's not like I end up with a bunch of extra cash at the end. A few months after putting out an LP, I might have 200 more dollars than I had before I started, but that's not a guarantee. The last two tapes we've done, those for Wash and Hospice, really should have been LPs, but we didn't have the money.

MRR: Is putting out your own records DIY determination or vanity?
Greg: It's a little bit of bit of both. Vanity probably plays more of a role in people forming bands / doing music than anyone would like to think about.

MRR: In the nine years you have been operating SOD, what has changed about the business of running a label?
Ryan: We don't need CD-Rs anymore, and chorus pedals are more prevalent than they should be. More specifically, our recording / mastering / lacquer process has become more reliable. We press smaller quantities.

MRR: Ryan, do you feel annoyed that the label is often presented as GG King's label?
Greg: I'll take this one: no he doesn't. But seriously folks, Ryan is the lone force behind the SOD empire. I long ago vacated any duties beyond consultation and record stamping / stuffing.
Ryan: What he fails to mention is that consultation involves page-long texts demanding detailed responses on the most trivial aspects of every step of each project. He is also the fastest stamper there is. But I don't feel annoyed. In the beginning it helped sell records, and I never felt under-appreciated with regards to SOD.

MRR: Are there any releases that you wanted to do but they fell through? Any big ones that got away?
Greg: I honestly can't think of anything that we've wanted to release that we haven't been able to.
Ryan: There was talk at one point of doing a Carbonas demos record. I just wanted to hear the demos, but no one could find them. Eventually I got to hear all that stuff when we compiled the Carbonas double LP for Goner Records, so I got my wish.

MRR: If you had more resources, what would you like to do with label?
Greg: More merchandising like guitar picks, pants, and vape pens. I can't speak for Ryan, but I imagine he wouldn't want this operation to be any larger than it already is.
Ryan: I always wanted to do a music video like some of the early Flying Nuns acts did—"Beatnik" by the Clean, "North by North" by the Bats, "Pink Frost" by the Chills. The video for "Don't Fight It Marsha" by Blam Blam Blam is great, too. Never got to do one like that, but Uniform has a really cool video for a track on their LP.

MRR: You guys have worked together on a lot of projects. What are your strengths in this collaborative relationship? What are the drawbacks?
Greg: Ryan is a level-headed, creative, and capable dude. If I have a weird idea, musically or otherwise, he is the one who knows how to actually accomplish what I'm asking for. His main drawback is his multi-seasonal lust for Cadbury eggs (how does he have them in July?)
Ryan: Apart from being an amazing songwriter and having one of the coolest voices in punk—I have his famous "BAY-BEH!" permanently on hand in my sampler—Greg has vision, patience, and insight. Working on his records has been the most fulfilling work I have done. It's simultaneously straightforward and wide open. It's like a Zelda game. After humankind has departed this earth in whichever fashion is fated, aliens will visit and unearth a Carbonas record, and from this artifact they will conclude that Greg King must've been a world leader, and that babies were clearly held in high esteem in contemporary society. The downside of this is that when I wake up from cryo-sleep eons after my initial death, I will have to worship a misconstrued version of my long-dead friend.

MRR: Which release was the most fun / coolest / most rewarding?
Greg: Probably putting together *Land of Nod*, what with the amount of people involved and the general scope of it. Also going back to the very beginning, assembling the Ralph EP and then seeing people outside of Atlanta buying it and digging on it.
Ryan: I agree. Despite all of the headaches involved in its production, *Land of Nod* is maybe the most important and rewarding thing we've done. I don't like my production on the Ralph recording, but it was a lot of fun to put together and send out.

MRR: What's next?
Ryan: We've got a solo project from Brannon Greene, the guy behind bands like Predator, Nag, Acid Freaks, GHB, etc. And I have a solo record coming out that has been in the works for a long time. I've pulled a lot of favors to get this one in the can, and as a result, lots of people either played on it or sat in the producer's chair while I tracked it. It's long and all over the place—continuity is not a goal for me. Some songs are just a joke put to tape and others are earnest efforts. I'm worried that it will flop, but it's the record that I've wanted to make for a while.
Greg: Anyone who was planning on buying *Winds of Winter*, save yourself some time and money and pick up the Ryan Dino LP.

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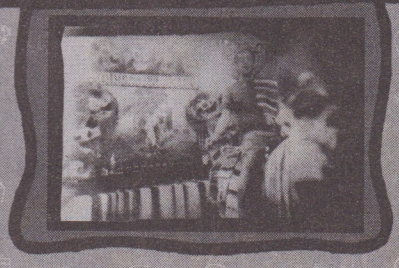

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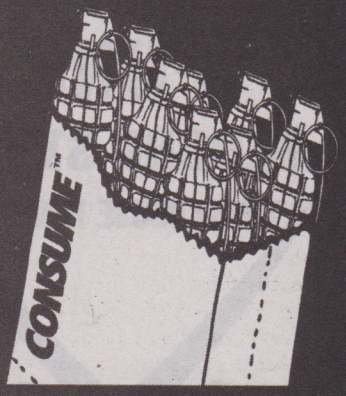

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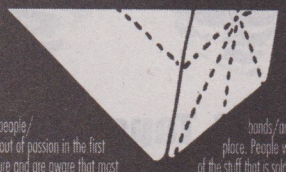

We like to meet people/ bands/art/sport/etc. that do what they do out of passion in the first place. People who believe in underground culture and are aware that most of the stuff that is sold nowadays under that flag is total crap only made to make money, get in touch. To put it with Fugazi's words:

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LIZ SUBURBIA

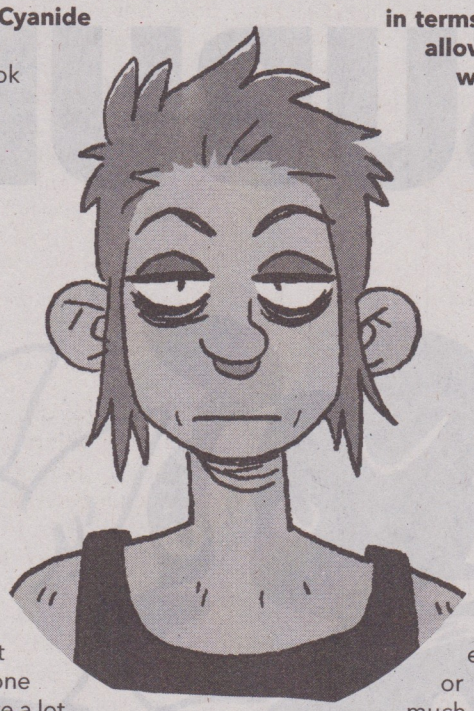
Liz Suburbia's new book, compiling all issues of *Cyanide Milkshake* (minus the lost first installment), really captures the feel of punks walking the thin line between the no shower taking, trash for dinner, beer for breakfast lifestyle, and the responsible, do-what-you-love, and actually give a shit about something existence that characterizes so many of us. These comics are consistently poignant, smart, and *so fucking funny*, conveying that joy you find reading your friend's zine and that determination that you could and should probably just make your own. As Liz writes in the GBA storyline, "You can trust your dinner's not poison if you cook it yourself." Out now on Gimme Action!

Introduction and interview by Jesska Hughes.
Illustrations by Liz Suburbia.

MRR: What year did you start writing Cyanide Milkshake?
Liz: You know, I'd have to like go look through them again, but I want to say around 2009, 2010. It feels a lot longer ago than it actually was.

MRR: 2009, 2010, was that the first and lost issue?
Liz: No, the lost issue was in 2007. No, it was early 2008.

MRR: You mention there are things that you wrote in that issue, in particular, that feel as though they're from a less enlightened time in your life and perspective. Were there things from other issues that made you cringe during editing these many years later?
Liz: Okay. I mean, most of it. I'm definitely not at the point in my artistic development where I can look back on anything I've done and feel super good about it, and I feel like a lot of Cyanide Milkshake, the goal was to put it out fast, which means that a lot of stupid jokes kind of got through that I didn't really think too hard about editing or filtering, which probably shows, and I think might also be part of the appeal. But I don't think there's anything that's maybe too careless or hurtful to other people, but there's definitely stuff that I feel like makes me look like a dork, which I guess is true. That's fine.



MRR: Are you more conscious now of what you're writing? Or are there things you worry still won't age well? Even non-politically?
Liz: Well, not to be too personal about it, but I always feel like I'm kind of playing catch up to my friends and peers as far as, you know, things like maturity and general understanding and wisdom. So I think there's always stuff, even the most recent stuff I look back on and I think like, "oh, I might have done something a little differently there, I could've made this better," or "I could've said something here that I had an opportunity to say, something that might've been good to say, and I didn't take it." Or maybe that other thing didn't need to be said, so I could have taken it out. But, you know, since I'm kind of making comics around my day job, that definitely cuts into my time for editing and reflection because I definitely feel the pressure to keep making work and keep putting it out on a regular basis. There's a kind of a self imposed sense of a crunch to it that maybe makes me a little less careful than I would be otherwise. But I'm always trying to grow as a person and become more aware and conscious and wise and good. Hopefully that filters through. You gotta trust that'll filter through to your work.

MRR: I really appreciate the Notes from the Editor section. It kind of reads as a page of positive reminders about being punk and having a flexible definition of what that means, in terms of, like, staying subversive while we allow ourselves to grow as people, and I wonder if that is something you think about a lot.
Liz: All the time, constantly. And I don't know, I say that, and maybe I'm thinking about it even more than ever now because I feel like I'm less organically integrated into living that way. I mean, the nature of my work is really isolating, and, you know, my social skills were never that great to begin with, but my day job, and making comics as well, they're both very solitary. I don't interact with other people very much, and I end up feeling kind of alienated from the punk scene or the comics scene—it's not because anyone is reaching out and making me feel alienated. I'm not really interacting with other people enough to run up against bad behavior or against awkward social situations very much. It's more that I feel kind of disconnected. I've moved around a lot in the last couple of years. We finally found a place where we settled down, but I haven't really gone to very many shows. We've been in the city where we are now for getting close to a year, but I haven't really gotten out and like made friends and become part of a group.

MRR: So when you're dealing with that sort of isolation, is it more important for you to get a message across in your work than you think that maybe it would be otherwise if you just had like a regular platform of talking to friends or something like that?
Liz: I think that connecting to that kind of thing in my work is definitely good for me and it helps me kind of remember who I am, even as I feel like I'm kind of getting like flushed down the toilet of capitalism, but it's harder to kind of keep faith, you know, you feel less sure of yourself because you feel like the shore that you came from is kind of far away. I hope that will change soon, that things will slow down with work, and we'll get more settled in this city that we're living in, and I'll go back to feeling more integrated. I keep using that word.

MRR: What was the punk scene like where you grew up? Have you noticed that things have changed the way punks have been relating in the punk scene as time passed?
Liz: Um, I mean I came of age in the DC area, you know, I didn't move there until my junior year of high school, so that was where I got exposed to punk and to comics and DIY and all that. And it was really good. I wouldn't say I was part of the real super in-crowd, I was a little bit on the outside of things both because I didn't live in DC proper and because I was kind of used to being a new kid a lot growing up. So my social skills could be a little better. But, you know, the DC scene is very political, and very active, and very big on being inclusive to women and queers and being a good group of people,

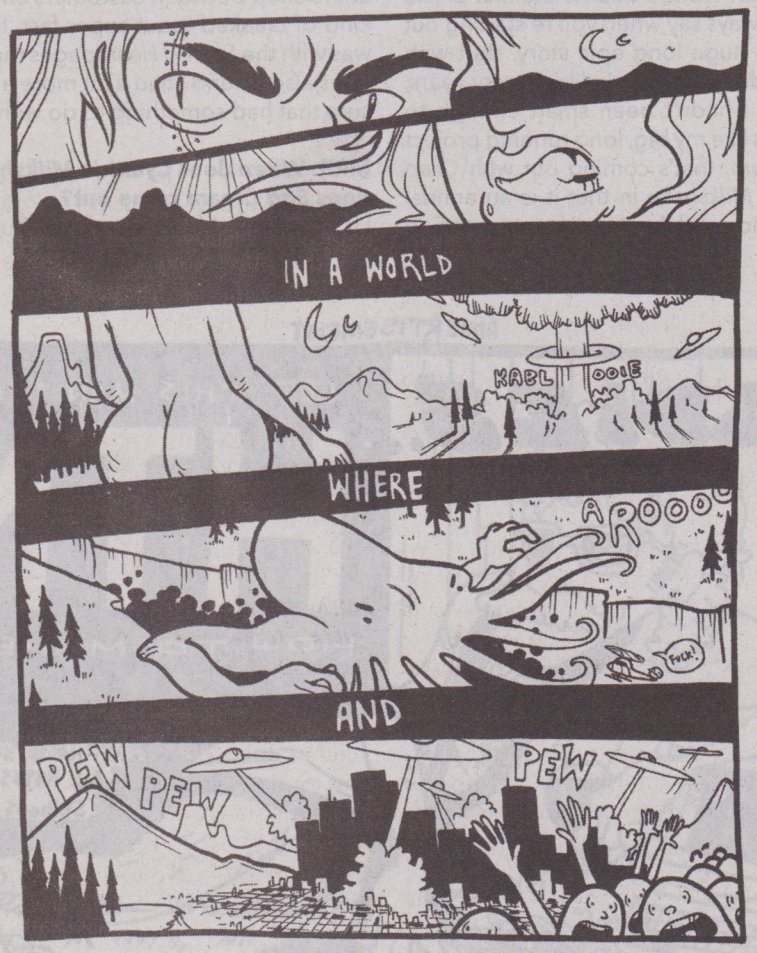
and not just a bunch of angry white guys on the mic. At least the part of it that I was exposed to. I don't feel super well connected with it for the last couple of years. But I know that at least helping me to feel connected with what bands are playing, and where the discourse is at socially, and what other punks I know across the country are doing, you know, the internet definitely helps with that. Every once in a while I'll get out to comic shows, like the Small Press Expo, or I got to go to San Diego Comic-Con last summer because they had me as a guest. So I get to hang out with like the Silver Sprocket group, like Avi and all them, and it's good to be around folks who are really trying to keep the DIY and punk spirit alive when it comes to really making comics and distributing them to a wider audience and bringing new artists into the fold. And you know, artists from, again, like I said, about the DC punk scene, artists from diverse backgrounds, not just a bunch of white dudes writing about how depressed they are, which I feel like, was a lot of indie comics when I was just starting to get into indie comics, but it's so much better now.

MRR: It's funny you describe at some point feeling a sort of imposter syndrome when reading over your own comics–that they aren't real enough. What is it that you think makes something real, that would make a lot of those people feel real? What are you striving to create to get there?

Liz: That's an amazing question. I think the work that feels realistic to me that I appreciate the most is a combination of unselfconsciousness, but also really adding something of value to the conversation. People from experiences that don't get a lot of play otherwise, you know, I mean, diversity is such a buzzword these days, but especially in a scene like comics where it's kind of–everybody has the power to make a comic. You don't have to break in, you just have to start making stuff and start showing it to people. I think it's maybe a nice home for the kind of loose unselfconscious and really honest work from people who don't get much of a voice or platform in other kinds of scenes. Which isn't to say comics doesn't have a lot of problems with abusers or any of that kind of stuff, because it does, but the work that I find, that I'm comparing myself to, is being done by people like Carta Monir, and Sophia Foster-Dimino, and Richie Pope, and all kinds of people just making really, really amazing work. Ben Passmore is putting out some of my favorite stuff right now, which is really, really funny and really, really political, and his art style is so unselfconscious, it seems to me, and really well developed, like he can just dash it off, and I always look at his work and be like, man, this is exactly the kind of stuff I wish I've been doing. So how am I going to challenge myself to make sure I'm not just like a pale copy of Ben's work? Well now, now it's a challenge. Now I gotta figure out what I have to say that's different. How am I going to bring a different perspective to it?

MRR: And you are so encouraging of other people creating their own thing in every issue of your comic, you're reminding people that they can do it themselves. And I know you were inspired and encouraged by other people to get your start. Have you always been drawing comics? I mean, was this a first experience creating a DIY publication?

Liz: I always drew a lot as a kid, and I liked to draw comic strips because I liked to read comic strips in the newspaper. I was kind of discouraged from reading comic books for a while there growing up, so I read them at the store, didn't buy them and bring them home or anything. Then when we moved to the DC area, in high school, I met Kevin Czapiewski who runs Czap Books, which is putting out my next book Egg Cream. Kevin is one of my dearest friends in the world, and our senior year they gave me my first zine which they had made with their older brother Matt, and that was the first time I'd ever seen somebody actually putting together something like that, and distributing it to people around them, which kind of blew my mind. I didn't make my first zine then, but Matt also had a webcomic and, to this day, I don't know why I decided to go the webcomic route instead of the zine route first. Though I do think they're both very, very similar in how accessible they are for people just starting out, you know, if you know how to do like a little bit of html, you can just kind of throw a

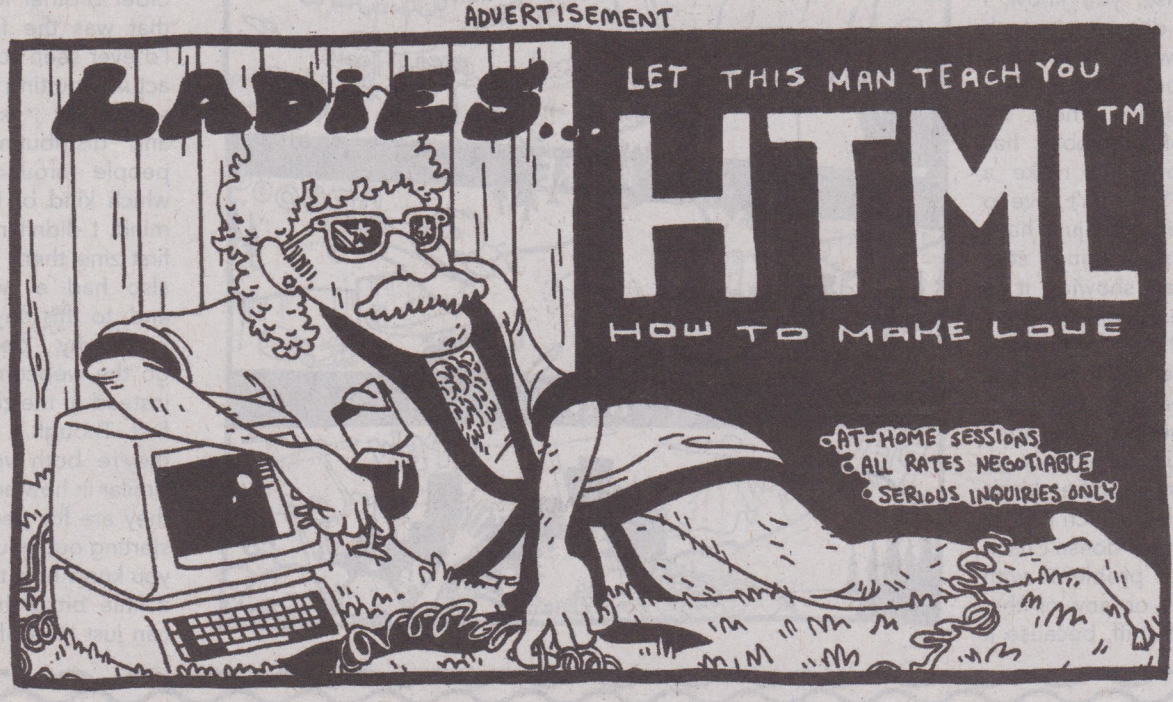


little comic up on the Internet. So I had a really crappy and embarrassing webcomic online for a couple of years and that was kinda my first start. Once I kinda got tired of doing that, that was when I was like, "well let's experiment with something else," and made my first zine, and I think I found that I liked making that a lot better even though my book, *Sacred Heart*, did still start as a web comic. I started by posting it online but not to get it twisted. I more started [*Sacred Heart*] like that just because I felt like I had to.

MRR: What's up with *Sacred Heart*? What is it? Is it still happening? Is it similar to the current stuff you're doing?
Liz: Well, I got an idea for a story that eventually turned into a graphic novel, and I started by just putting pages up. You know, it was more of a traditional like comic book, not so much a zine or a comic strip like I tried before. I just started putting pages up online because I was like, "oh, this is going to be really long," and I thought eventually that I would like compile it and self publish it so I can have a little book that I made on my own shelf because I was like, "oh, I don't want to wait until I'm finally done with it years from now to show people it." So I just started putting the pages up online as I was doing that. And that eventually, long story short, turned into a book deal with the publisher Fantagraphics, and I redid the pages, finished it all in one fell swoop, and it came out as a book a couple of years ago. And the book is the first of like a four volume series. They always say when you're starting out in comics, don't start with a huge long epic story, start with short stuff and if you're still doing comics in like twenty years, do your big epic story, but I hadn't been smart enough to listen to that advice. So this is like my big, long running project and the new one, *Egg Cream*, that's coming out with Czap Books, is a lot like *Cyanide Milkshake* in that it is an annual collection of a bunch of comics, and they're all by me, but *Egg Cream* is also going to have installments of the next volume of *Sacred Heart* because I don't have the physical ability to sit down and crank out another 300 page book in one sitting like I did with the first one. So I'm just doing it in chapters–basically releasing the chapters as part of *Egg Cream*. I know it's very confusing and convoluted and probably gonna make it harder for people to find what I'm doing, but it's the best thing for me to make work around my life, because comics, and making comics, take up a lot of energy.

MRR: I can imagine. So you started *Cyanide Milkshake* in the period of time that you were doing *Sacred Heart*. Were you able to prioritize both and keep that kind of creative energy separate at that time?
Liz: Yeah, I mean at the time I had creative energy to spare because I was working at a comic book shop, so I had a lot of downtime where I was just kinda sitting around the shop, and I was surrounded by comics, so I had nothing to do but basically read comics and be influenced by comics, and when I wasn't doing that I could sit and draw, you know, unless the customer needed help with something. So I was drawing *Sacred Heart* pages on my days off, but I was also thinking of like, funny gags and stuff like that, and little shorter stories, and one offs, and I thought "well, what if I just did a zine like I did a couple of years ago?" So I did that at work when I was at the shop between customers and stocking shelves and just kind of cranked it out super fast. I wasn't careful with it like I was with the *Sacred Heart* pages that I was doing at home, and I was also 25 and I had a lot more energy than I do now. So I'm sure that had something to do with it.

MRR: When does *Cyanide Milkshake* come out? And when does *Egg Cream* come out?
Liz: *Cyanide Milkshake* came out from Gimme Action in



November. It's available now on the Gimme Action website, and *Egg Cream* is coming out early 2019. We're fulfilling the Kickstarter backers first, but it's finished now, so it'll be ready to go for everybody to check out early in the year from Czap Books.

MRR: Well then one last question. You've already mentioned some, but what comics do you love right now, and historically?
Liz: We could be here all night.

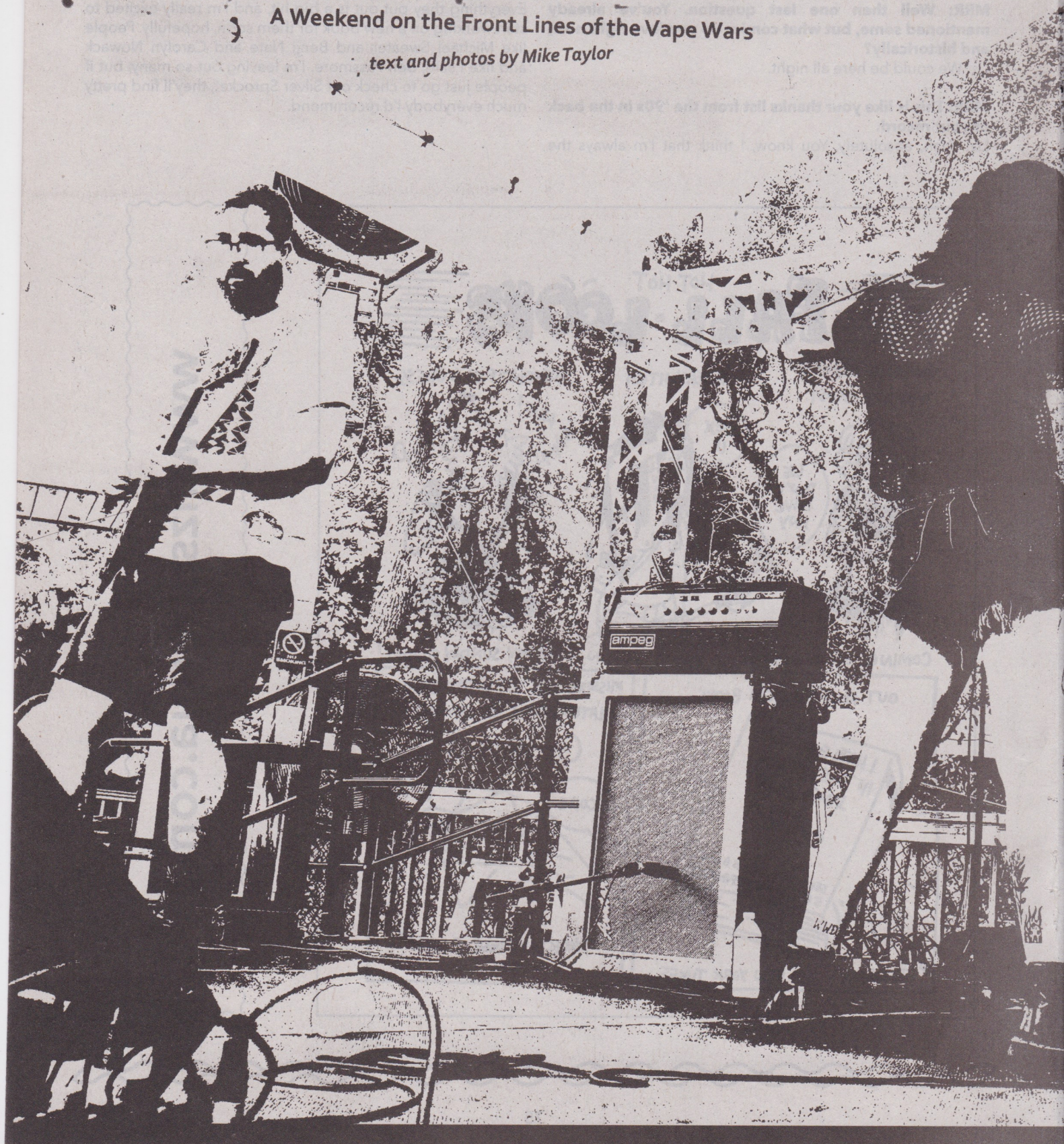
MRR: This is like your thanks list from the '90s in the back of your record.
Liz: Yeah, absolutely. You know, I think that I'm always the most in love with the stuff that my friends are doing. My friend Kevin is always putting out great work, I'm very influenced by Janelle at Gimme Action's funny autobio comics, and you know, everybody at Silver Sprocket is releasing really great stuff, and I feel like they're just gaining more and more power. Everything they put out is a big hit, and I'm really excited to start working on a new book for them soon, hopefully. People like Michael Sweater and Benji Nate and Carolyn Nowack and like I said, Ben Passmore. I'm leaving out so many, but if people just go to check out Silver Sprocket, they'll find pretty much everybody I'd recommend.

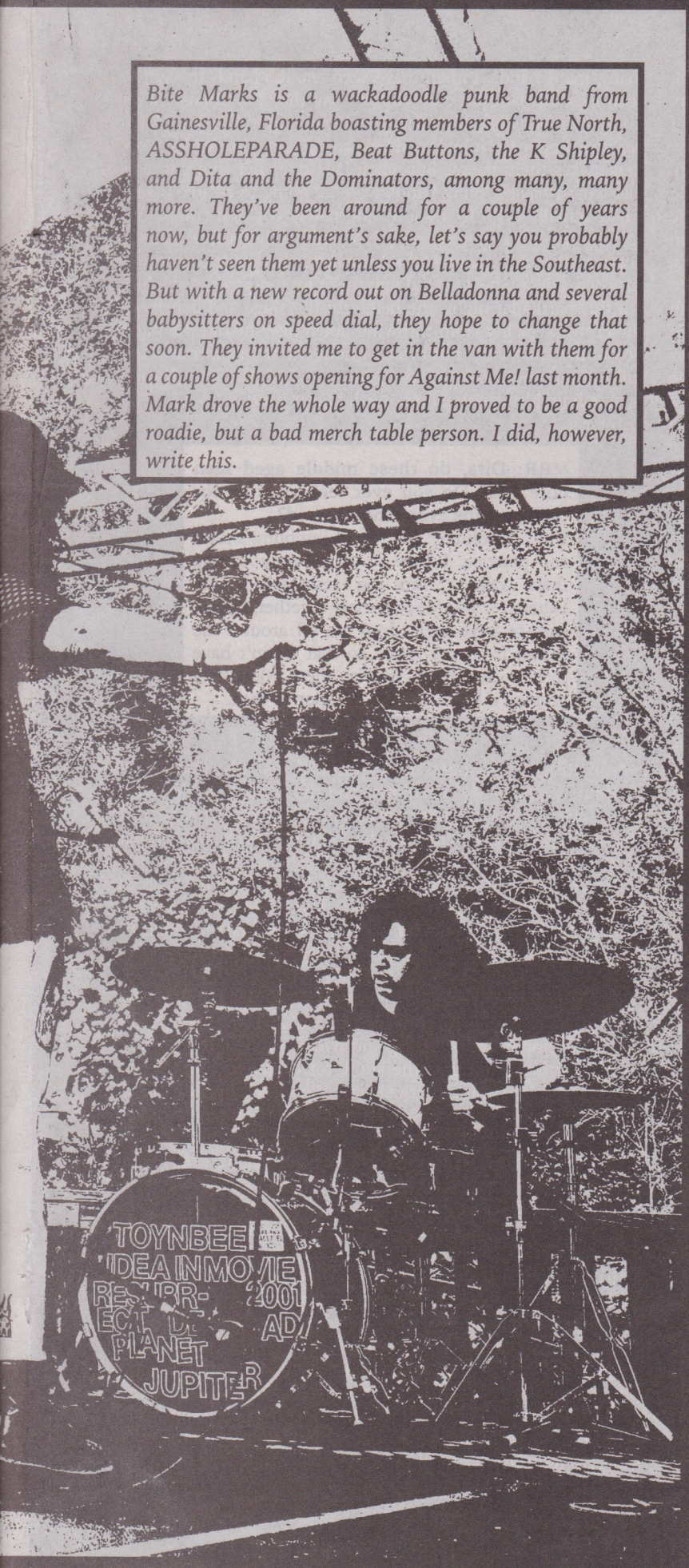
www.lizsuburbia.com

BITE MARKS

A Weekend on the Front Lines of the Vape Wars

text and photos by Mike Taylor





Bite Marks is a wackadoodle punk band from Gainesville, Florida boasting members of True North, ASSHOLEPARADE, Beat Buttons, the K Shipley, and Dita and the Dominators, among many, many more. They've been around for a couple of years now, but for argument's sake, let's say you probably haven't seen them yet unless you live in the Southeast. But with a new record out on Belladonna and several babysitters on speed dial, they hope to change that soon. They invited me to get in the van with them for a couple of shows opening for Against Me! last month. Mark drove the whole way and I proved to be a good roadie, but a bad merch table person. I did, however, write this.

Mark was fifteen minutes late to pick me up, but I didn't care because I'm not in the band. It's not like Bite Marks is going to get a real sound check, anyway. Gainesville to Athens, GA is about five and a half hours. If all goes well, the band will get to the 40 Watt after Against Me! and Iron Reagan have sound checked, but with plenty of time to load in and pregame a little.

Last night's show went especially late for Dita. It seems her date kept her up well into the wee hours, so when we arrived to pick her up, she wasn't exactly firing on all cylinders. I did not offer her my space in the front seat. James was next to get picked up, and he also wasn't ready to leave. He had to buy cat litter. However, he was forgiven seeing as he had the foresight to bring a cooler full of Micheladas and Twisted Teas for Dita. Spirits had lifted all around the back seat (I also did not offer James my seat in the front) by the time we got to Matt's job to pick him up. We waited in the parking lot until a concerned employee asked us why we were parked in a reserved spot. Dita took a long draw off her weed vape and told her, "Tom said it's cool," and leaned back into the dark recess of the minivan's back seat. The busybody furrowed her completely invented eyebrows and floated above her business pumps back inside. It should go without saying there is no "Tom"; however, as punks, we understand the delicate machinations of authority and understanding one's place within a hierarchy. Mrs. Business Shoes Parking Cop was simply relieved to be informed that someone beyond her pay grade was in control. Bite Marks is a kind and understanding band above all else.

We continued to wait. Two empty sixteen-ounce cans of bad drinks were deposited onto the floor. Mark texted and called Matt to no avail. I've been in bands with Mark and have traveled with him extensively, slept on many floors with him, and even shared a house. I'm tremendously pleased that even as a husband and father of two, he is still capable of simultaneous expressionless calm and brutal condescension, as he tells me, "This always happens. Matt's always late. I *told* him what time we'd be here." I've known Matt for 23 years now, and I, too, knew he would be late. But I didn't care. Because I'm not in the band. And I also knew I would not be giving him my seat in the front.

Eventually Matt materialized and climbed into the van, forcing Dita into the very uncomfortable middle seat. Everyone gently scolded Matt as he employed one of his many super powers—visibly and gently not giving a single fuck—and we made our way to I-75 through the most boring parts of Gainesville's corporate sprawl.

Against Me! megafans were already lined up outside of the 40 Watt Club when we pulled in to the parking lot. Mark and Matt had toured with a younger, smaller version of the band in their previous band together, True North. Lifetimes have passed since Against Me! became possibly the only major band (by major band I mean a band who could appear on the cover of say, *Rolling Stone*) whose front person has transitioned between genders publicly. When I used to book them in their earliest days, they attracted a certain type of crusty Springsteen fan; now the mini-Bosses still show up, but in equal ratio to gender challengers and queer punks. It's a weird world full of growing pains and endings both tragic and wonderful, and I'm happy to be here to see it.

We had just enough time to load in for a brief line check before the club opened its doors and immediately filled up. Matt disappeared while I set up his bass rig, wondering a.) if this cable doesn't work, why is it still in the box, and b.) how does someone play bass with the strap so low? He got back from his cigarette mission in time to twiddle some knobs while I set up the merch table, where I would proceed to test the patience of the other two bands' merch people for the duration of the show.

Bite Marks had just enough time in their closet-sized green room (it's not green, it's once-white and covered thoroughly in band graffiti, as it should be) for Dita to mentally prepare for the challenge at hand by getting thoroughly vaped up as the boys had a few drinks. Weed pen technology has changed backstage etiquette for all time, as it has for van etiquette, grocery store etiquette, and visiting your parents' house etiquette. If you can look past the Garbage Times Hellscape that is the entire government, private sector, and media machine, we are truly living in the wonder years.

Chances are you haven't seen Bite Marks. You might not have even heard their tape or new 12". The recordings are good, but to understand it, you have to see the show. James is an ambidextrous drummer, propelling the songs in a way that seems, at first, pretty average high energy style, but upon really listening, it gets tricky and strange in a way I can only compare to the days when bands like X and Fear had actual drummers, not just punks who played drums. (Don't get me wrong, but c'mon. DJ Bonebrake? Does anyone in a fast band come close right now? No. The answer is no.). Mark played drums in Palatka and True North and has since picked up guitar as well. But he doesn't play according to standard rules of songwriting, and not just in a way that most punk guitarists don't play traditionally (poorly and fast). Less like the Clash, more like the Slits. Guitar as texture, noise, context. You know? Matt was a guitarist in True North and now plays bass. He has a perfect ear for melody and structure, and his live presence is like a wolf who's just had his fill—he may not pursue you right this minute, but don't stick around too long. He also, weirdly, plays much of the music with one finger, sliding it around like he's playing shuffleboard. If you're a young bass player out there, don't do this.

MRR: Question for Matt: your super power has always been bringing the community together, and the way you do it has always been charmingly straight forward—you've said to me many times, "I've got a favor, and I need you to say yes." I've almost every time ended up doing it. Are you still good at this?
Matt: I have always thought my super power was seeing things in people that they did not see in themselves. Sometimes they just need some encouragement to bring it out.

Whenever there's a band of men fronted by a woman, the focus is on her; whenever there's a band full of middle aged men fronted by a woman who is attractive by most standards, the focus is *definitely* on her. Understood. But now that *that's* out of the way, I must tell you I have seen some bands. I've seen many, many bands. I might have seen enough bands to say I've seen enough bands. I don't like to say that I'm almost never impressed, but well, that's the case. I expected to like Bite Marks because they're my friends and I like to see them do creative work that makes them happy. But when Dita does her thing, it feels like what I *thought* punk bands were all going to be like before I had actually been to a show: alternately coy and combative, sexy, threatening, and *effective*. Not only is her voice halfway between Poly Styrene and John Joseph, but her stage presence is that of a singer who's been doing this a lot longer than she has. On this particular night, the height of the stage and density of the crowd kept her from throwing down like she did the night before in Gainesville, but even without the floor tantrums and full frontal crowd assault, she made sure Bite Marks held their own, admirably, opening for a much bigger band.

MRR: Dita, do these middle aged men bore you? Do you ever feel too cool for them, maybe even embarrassed?
Dita: Absolutely. On top of jumbling shows and practice, I have to worry about fitting their walkers into the gear-packed van. Whenever we ride to a show together, I make sure to have them drop me off around the corner from the venue so that I don't have to be seen walking in with them. Mark gets grumpy if he hasn't had his sponge bath.

Iron Reagan was next. They sounded just like middle-era Anthrax. Against Me! headlined and did what they do, well. It seemed the people were very happy, and from my seat at the merch table, their clothing designer also did very well that night (shout out Steak Mountain!). Maybe Bite Marks would sell more shirts if the front wasn't a headstone that says "I thought there'd be more fucking." Sometimes, though, the innate brilliance of an idea outweighs its market viability. Strictly speaking in terms of profit margin and unit dispersal, it's a great shirt and I'm glad they printed it.

As the venue emptied and beer was mopped up, we all retired backstage to drink Against Me!'s drinks and make plans for dinner and sleeping and whatever else. In a college town, waiting until after the show for dinner is foolish, but that's how the timing worked out. We ended up in a harsh neon diner hours after they stopped selling beer. I ate a veggie dog and an egg for some reason. Looking back, would it have been better to put the egg *on top* of the veggie dog? With sauerkraut? Did I fuck up? Like Don Henley says, don't look back on late night foods.

The important question over dinner was concerning a place to sleep. After a volley of texts, we ended up at an anonymous apartment complex and filed into what looked like, despite the television glowing blue in an otherwise dark void, a sales office. But no, it was an Airbnb that a traveling friend had graciously offered up. Dita gently assailed a lump under a sleeping bag on a couch, asking, "Hey, do you have like a pipe or something, my pen is broken..." As the rest of the band arranged themselves on various swaths of floor, Dita, the sleeping bag lump, and I retired to the patio through a sliding glass door to smoke weed out of a Budweiser tallboy can; smoke curled into the night like Caravaggio's staged angels, and then I brushed my teeth.

MRR: How bilingual is Bite Marks, percentage wise?

James: We went to eat at some small place in Miami, the kind of spot where you don't really hear English except for maybe someone on the phone with an English speaking person. TV, radio, people talking to each other, menu, all in Spanish. I ordered for myself, Mark, and Matt. Dita uncomfortably stumbled through her ordering (sorry, I mean no disrespect). Is that a good answer?

Matt: As the only white person in Bite Marks, I'd say we can get by.

Mark: I took two semesters of French and two semesters of Spanish in college. I don't think I remember most of it. Don't let Matt fool you, I have a Spanish background, but couldn't pass for anything but white.

Dita: James is the only fluent Spanish speaker. I can get by if I have to. I'm a halfie. Mark is a total poser with a Spanish last name. The Sweetness is just plain old white trash.

On the way out of town the next morning, we stopped for bagels. The store was absolutely packed with white people. Like, *just* white people. James turned to me and whispered, "I'm literally the only person of color in this whole place..." When the winding line reached the woman at the cash register where one gave their name to claim their order, James offered "Ñ," as in how white liberals make use of saying "the N-word" when retelling a story employing the most unacceptable of hate speech, but for Latinos. When the unknowing bagel store employee called out "Enyay" for James's bagel, we giggled like school children and were on our way.

Overnight, Dita's Tinder account had blown up, and she may or may not have remembered allowing Mark and me to respond as her. "Dick pic or GTFO" was Mark's opening volley, and I returned with "Bad news. Results came in from the clinic." After AM radio silence, we were back in the van when a potential suitor replied to our candor with "All those clinic results can tell me is you can party. And I LOVE TO PARTY." There was more, but it's not really suitable for print. Sir, if you're reading this, well played, and the best of luck to you.

Winding through the depressed back roads of central Georgia, it became imperative for Dita to replace her broken weed pen. We stopped at a small gas station where James seriously considered not leaving the van. Although there were no vape pens to be found at the store, we did discover a (sadly broken) prophylactic machine vending condoms bearing Osama Bin Laden's face on them. Had only I at least one of those gems, but alas, no. Also purchased at this sad little store for .26 ("we have to charge tax, baby") was a local newspaper bearing the urgent front page news that a local woman had won a Yeti cooler from a raffle she had unknowingly entered at a local veterinarian's office. "I didn't know what it was, but it seems exciting. It's right on my front porch if y'all wanna come see it." We briefly pondered whether or not we should go steal her cooler on the way out of town, because those things are expensive; but the paper didn't list her address. Ostensibly it's a small enough town that everyone just knows where she lives. I hope many cousins and business acquaintances

drop by to bear witness to the spoils.

On our second try, Dita finally found a place to sell her a vape pen. Once she was over the distinct possibility of throwing up, she told us about getting kicked out of Catholic school for wearing a Slipknot back patch. Matt told us he had seen Slipknot headline over both Slayer and Motörhead. I've never heard Slipknot, but in my imagination, they're like the Blue Man Group performing a theatrical version of Texas Chainsaw Massacre. Maybe I should check them out.

Ceding my seat up front to James, I was free to get high in the back seat all the way to St. Augustine. Georgia in the early fall was sad and beautiful zipping by my window. Having grown up not terribly far away, I silently wondered how the small towns would weather further economic depression and culture war. I felt like we were a benign cancer coursing through its paved veins. I briefly worried about getting pulled over and maybe having to talk to a cop while high. You know.

All of these stoned thoughts ended abruptly at the next snack stop, where I found a locally produced magazine I can only liken to the back pages, but for farm girls. Along with a canister of Pringles, I paid for a copy and read it aloud to the band all the way home. Poorly reproduced photographs of aggressively made up single moms in bathing suits, declaring their love of guns and animals both, draped over John Deere tractors or lounging around the kitchen, stained linoleum curling at the floor's edge in what I know from experience to be a mobile home. If anyone reading this is familiar with this magazine, or others like it, please get in touch. I would like to collect them.

MRR: So why hardcore? Is it important in 2018?

James: I moved to Gainesville only really knowing how to play guitar somewhat. You've known me for a while, and I think you've only seen me play guitar twice, with the same band, two nights in a row, within the last couple of years. I feel Gainesville forces you to become a multi instrumentalist and learn to think musically outside of your comfort zone. That is, if you want to play music bad enough. There's always some extra seats at the bar if you don't.

Why not hardcore? I've always wanted to play in a band that sounds like they could have a release on Gravity Records, Mark and Matt have had that opportunity since living here, but most bands I've been in have been more in the indie / shoegaze / pop sensibility vein. I'm actually not the first drummer for Bite Marks, just for reference, and I'm not saying that Bite Marks sounds like what I said earlier, but there's definitely an aggression and wildness to the music that strikes a chord in me in a way other styles don't. Not saying I don't or won't play other styles, I actually do, somewhat actively, it's just that hardcore, at least the kind I like, has that pure energy, that feel that...I was going to say can't be faked, but we've all seen it faked many times before. But that's the thing, you can tell when it's being faked. When it isn't, there's a beauty in it, something inexplicable. Like if you could come up with a term like "umami," but for the ears. Or maybe hardcore isn't important at all, and I should just listen to UGK. Actually, that's not a bad idea. RIP Pimp C.

Dita: Mark wanted to be in a band that he didn't play drums in for once, so James took the place of our original drummer. We never talked about what we wanted to sound like before we got together. Once I heard the music, I wanted to jump around / scream / yell / roll around on the floor. Very little is premeditated. Demonic temper tantrums apparently come natural to me. If we are categorized as a hardcore band, I am into that. Hardcore is important to me in 2017...but so is smoking weed and watching *The Best of Chris Farley* DVD every day of my life.

Matt: It is a funny lineup in that James is the best guitar player. Mark is the best drummer. I'm old, and Amandita actually knows what she's doing. I like the lineup, it took a bit to get comfortable but it works now. James rips, Amanda is the fun part, and Mark is the only one who can remember the songs. I can only play bass one way, it's really up to the people I'm playing with to interpret the music in a unique fashion. I think if you took any of my bass parts from any band I have ever been in, you can drop them in any of the other bands fairly seamlessly. Maybe the BPM needs adjusting, but...I was serious when I said dedicated to hardcore.

Mark: When Matt and Dita told me we were starting this band, I assumed I was going to be playing drums. I had recently switched from drums to guitar and played in some bands, but figured Matt would play guitar and I would play drums. It didn't work out that way, which I'm glad about because I had grown a little tired of playing drums. I'm not sure that I'm the best drummer in the band either. James plays stuff that blows me away all the time. Like James said, I love the energy of hardcore music. I like tons of other kinds of music too, but when it comes to playing music, I find myself only leaning towards this kind of stuff now.

Back in St. Augustine, Florida, Matt's and Mark's wives and kids had come up from Gainesville for the weekend with a group of other moms for a wild weekend, which involved going to see the Decemberists. We were continuing with the theme of running late for Matt to watch all the children while the ladies went out for the evening. As Matt grumbled at Mark, at the wheel, we pulled alongside a fifteen-passenger van full of white people wearing fedoras and clean button down shirts, looking very much like a pack of NPR contest winners on their way to Sandals, Jamaica. We were back in Florida, and this was the Decemberists on their way from the airport.

We went our separate ways for an evening off, but reconvened the next day for an afternoon show at the side stage of the St. Augustine Amphitheater, kind of opening for Against Me! again, but kind of playing a totally separate show. It was hot. Really, really hot. Bite Marks took the stage around 3 PM, the height of the day's crushing, ridiculous humidity. Everyone was drenched before they even began playing. Even Dita's weekend

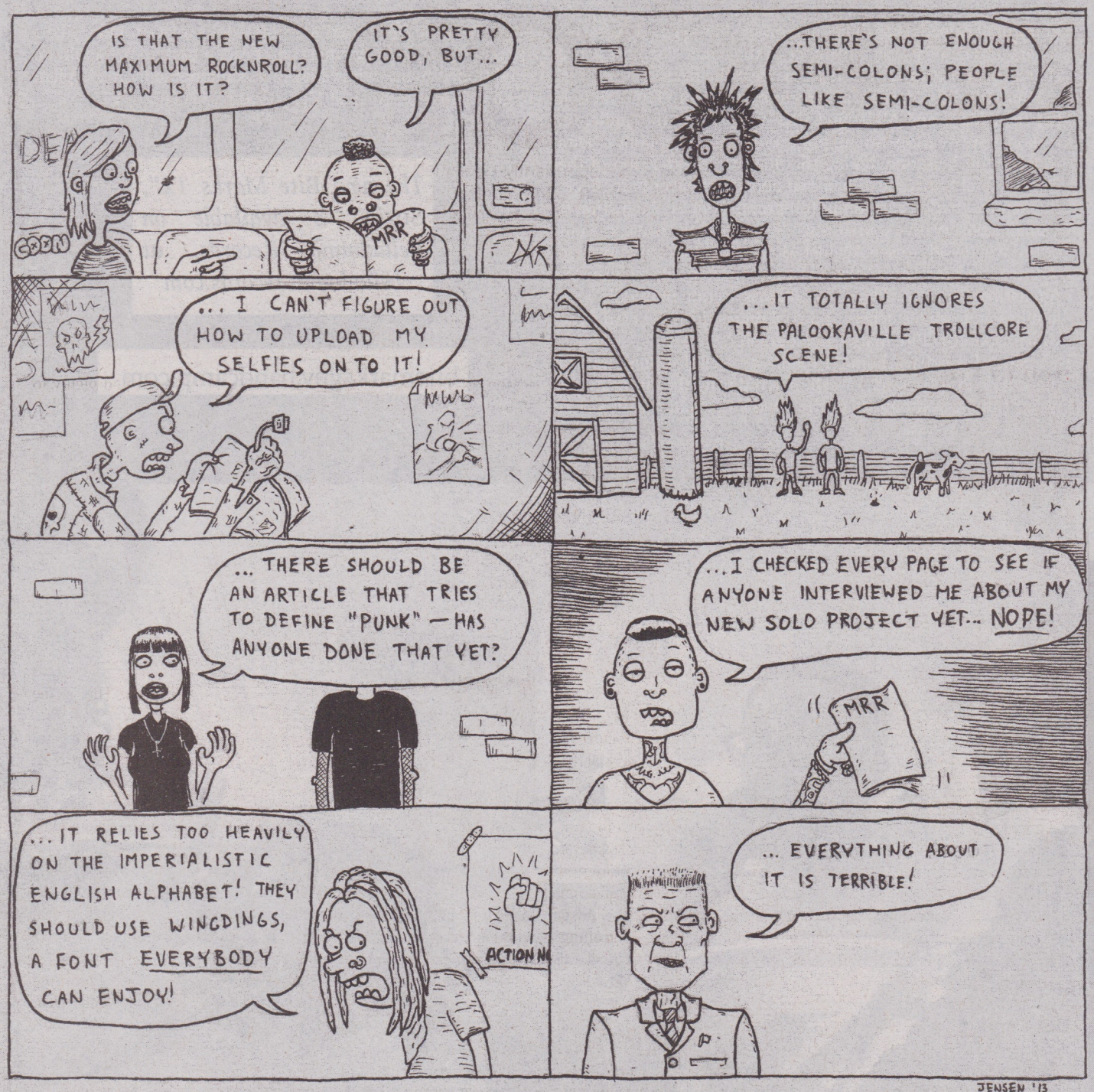
uniform of ripped daisy dukes and mesh shirt seemed excessive coverage. The heat was a member of the band. The heat was a character in the novel. The heat the heat the heat.

But still, Bite Marks was ferocious. There are four children between Mark and Matt, and they were all in the audience, responsibly wearing bright pink shooting headphones. Dita was back in her zone, taking the floor as an extension of the stage, a feral hurricane of hair and boots and lower butt cheek, the band a gnarled cartoon in full propulsion. St. Augustine is a small, conservative tourist town, but the freaks had come out of the woodwork to see Against Me!, HIRS Collective, War on Women, and openers, Gilt—the only queer punk band in St. Augustine! The crowd was a good cross section of middle aged families and genderfuckers and cool dudes drinking craft beer, which is kind of Bite Marks' demographic.

Since I was back home, I totally neglected to help unload the van, load it back up, or sell merch during the show. It was great. I drank some more of the band's Gatorade (It was that hot! The venue provided a whole cooler of Gatorade, like a sports game!) and gave hugs and headed back to my adult, air conditioned house while Bite Marks undoubtedly made plans to go eat some of Against Me!'s food backstage.

The new Bite Marks 12", Sucia, is available on Belladonna Records, at belladonna-records.com

bitemarksgnv.bandcamp.com



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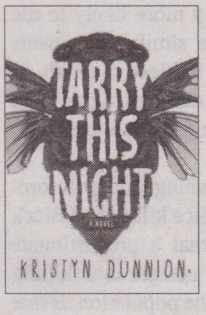


Tarry This Night
Kristyn Dunnion
Arsenal Pulp Press, 2017
258 pgs | $14.95

Father Ernst is a creepy, abusive, Biblically-inspired cult leader raising an inbred family in an underground bunker. Husband to six brides already, he has his eyes set on young Ruth as the seventh. Ruth, however, has other ideas. Thus begins Kristyn Dunnion's newest novel *Tarry This Night*, which straddles the line between science fiction and horror. Dunnion is best known for her short story collection *The Dirt Chronicles*, about street kids and runaways. She is also known for her young adult novel *Mosh Pit* about two punk girls who find love, as well as playing bass in queer metal bands Heavy Filth and Bone Doner. Her newest novel represents a departure from her focus on realism, but still contains a lot of trademark gore she is known for.

Set in a post-apocalyptic America that feels unfortunately current, *Tarry* takes simultaneous aim at fundamentalist Christianity, environmental destruction, militarization, and the white power movement. Dunnion joins the growing list of Canadian authors who have (either literally or in a subtle way) taken a sharp look at American culture in their writing—Emma Donoghue and Margaret Atwood came to mind immediately for me. In Dunnion's future, the United States has been mostly destroyed after a civil war, making what remains of the outdoors as dangerous and undesirable as being imprisoned in an underground bunker with a dangerous, controlling religious fanatic. Even when the bunker begins to run out of food and supplies, Ernst's wives are reluctant to leave because their religious conditioning is so strong. Ruth's brother, Paul, heads out to hunt and bring back food for the family, but soon it becomes clear he may not make it back alive. Meanwhile, Rebekah, his secret lover, impatiently waits for him and kills time by plotting her escape. Once Father Ernst starts to realize he is losing control of the family, he tries to tighten his grip by forcing Ruth into marriage, and things get bloody very fast. This makes for a tense, grisly read, full of insight into how cults operate and why they are so powerful.

Yet perhaps because Dunnion is somewhat removed from America, or because she is attempting to tackle so many issues in one story, her post-apocalyptic world never feels truly flesh and blood. There is relatively little included about how the apocalypse occurred and the factors that led up to it, and most of the narrative is spent in the dreary bunker, trapping the reader in a stifling, claustrophobic atmosphere.

Most of the novel made me uncomfortable in a powerful way (discussions of ethics, food shortages, cannibalism, and survival), but some parts struck me as unnecessary, gratuitous suffering, particularly when relating to sexual assault. And while Ruth is an aimable heroine that the reader roots for, few of the minor characters merit the amount of time their stories are allotted. However, if you love reading about religious cults (or are a fan of the current *American Horror Story* season or Netflix series *Wild, Wild Country*), you will find plenty to enjoy here, as the bunker family is a fascinating microcosm in and of itself.

—Arielle Burgdorf

MDC: Double Life in Double Time
Al Schvitz
Manic D Press, 2018
$16.95 | 192 pgs

If Dave Dictor is the punk rock grandpa, Al Schvitz is the weird uncle you don't see much but remember every time you do. This is the second MDC member autobiography from Manic D Press, and though this one was mostly written in prison over twenty years ago, it is an excellent companion to Dave's book, which was written about a year ago. There are three core components here: one part MDC band biography, one part autobiography / prison memoir, one part journal of a developing writer. You're not going to find a lot of MDC stories in here that weren't already in the first book, but the heart of this book is watching Al deal with his incarceration and relate it to his experiences on tour, with his family, and on his personal journey.

As you progress through the book, you watch Al become more sure in his storytelling ability. Where, in the beginning, jokes and "Dear Reader" comments act as a suture to close up the lack of confidence, they become intentional and more an element of style towards the end of the book. In the final chapters of the book, you are on a ride with an Al, whose control of his words and pacing would not be believed by the shaky and nervous Al from the beginning of the book.

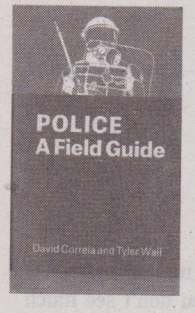
As a frequent world traveler, I strongly enjoyed Al's take on the many countries he visited with the band. His ability to illustrate minute cultural differences in a way that is understandable, entertaining, and inoffensive should be coveted by many travel writers. The stories of European squats, problematic Canadian border crossings, and occasionally bringing his young son along for the ride are compelling, humorous, and at times educational. In particular, the tenderness he illustrates in stories with his son are some of the most enjoyable parts of the book. His insistence that his pre-teen son taste beer at a Comiskey Park baseball game before the stadium's demolition is hilarious and a great illustration of his important instincts as a dad.

One notable weakness would be the lack of details and time spent

on what got him sent to prison in the first place. The skeleton is there, explaining the crime (drug dealing) and the parole violations, but for his prison time being the main narrative, there is not a notable amount of time put into reflection on what got him there. It's hard to determine if he regrets the behavior or has no regrets aside from the time lost with his family. A slightly lengthier intro and epilogue, both only one page, would have also been welcomed bookends, providing more details on Al's life currently and what has happened since his jail time in the '90s. Overall, though, these do not detract from a supremely entertaining story. If you have even a passing interest in MDC or '80–'90s hardcore, you're not going to be disappointed after spending a couple hours with this book. No war, no KKK, no fascist USA.

—Ryan Hert

Police: A Field Guide
David Correia and Tyler Wall
Verso Books, 2018
278 pages | $19.95



Take warning: this book may destroy your ability to put your politics on hold to enjoy buddy cop television. After reading this book, I attempted to watch a popular police dramedy recommended by some friends with good taste. I fumed every minute of the show. Before, I recognized problematic nature of romanticizing police on screen but could shove my politics to the back of my mind long enough to enjoy a police procedural. Now every detail, every charming one liner, reminds me of the dangers of portraying police as relatable, charming good guys.

Media influences our perception of the world, which is why we have the truism "art imitates life and life imitates art." Our worldview is also shaped by the language we use. When the language we use to describe policing is coined and branded by the police, it works to uphold their power.

Correia and Wall, radical scholars and professors, compiled an encyclopedic breakdown of common policing terms. Consider it a translation manual to a language the authors have dubbed Copspeak. They define and unpack seemingly commonplace items, like the flashlight. Bulky, police-issue flashlights double as clubs. The authors also concern themselves with the literary symbolism of objects: police believe they cast light into the dark underbelly of the criminal world. Historical ties are made between the language of the modern police force and the slave patrol; the slave patrol gave modern police the expression "the beat."

Studies are cited regarding the inefficacy of various police protocols. For instance, in a famous study, patrolling was not found to deter crime, yet the patrol is a staple of everyday police work. Police helicopters dip over low income areas, but cannot apprehend suspects in any practical way. Why then does the state bankroll these major expenses? Perhaps the practices have more to do with conveying the feeling of police presence, the impression of police omnipresence than securing the well being of constituents. Again the authors delve beyond the literal function of policing terms and into their greater significance.

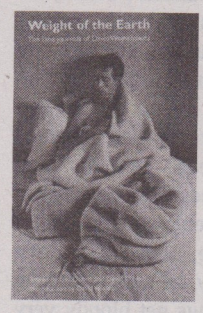
"Broken windows" is a criminological theory and approach to policing discussed at length. The idea is that a building with one broken window will soon have all its windows broken. When one building is dilapidated, other buildings in the neighborhood will soon meet the same fate. The neighbors—surely good, respectable families—will stop talking to one another. Illegal drug users and unhoused people will begin hanging out in the neighborhood. Crime will increase in the area and spread to other parts of the city. Soon society will be enveloped in violent crime: it all started with a broken pane of glass. Police view their role in society as the "thin blue line" between order and chaos. They believe that if jaywalking and selling loose cigarettes are permitted, these minor infractions will spark an inferno of violent crime. Therefore they must harshly enforce even the pettiest concerns of law. In short, the American approach to policing is based on an oft lethal version of the slippery slope fallacy.

Tasers, for instance, are marketed as nonlethal weapons, a less violent alternative, but the authors point to the dozens people killed by tasers each year. Police advocates weave their own pseudoscience, claiming the existence of a condition called "Excited Delirium Syndrome" that causes people to be more susceptible to taser deaths. The condition is not medically recognized. Similarly, to explain away strangulation deaths, in 1982 Los Angeles Police Chief Daryl Gates claimed that "some Blacks" are more biologically more likely to die in a chokehold than "normal people." He made similar statements suggesting an increased likelihood of Black men to bleed to death. In his scientifically incorrect statements, Chief Gates deferred blame from killer cops, blamed murder victims for their own fate, and implied a biological basis for white supremacy.

The authors critique the rhetoric of well meaning police reform advocates. When one refers to the frequency of police killings of Black people as "disproportionate," one is implying that a proportionate number of killings would be acceptable. If police increase their killing of other groups to be statistically proportionate to the population, is that an acceptable fix? Correia and Wall argue that police killings are not disproportionate but morally inexcusable. Expressions like "bad apple" suggest that cops are as a whole an ethical bunch. The language we use shapes our perception of the world. By examining the language we use to describe the police, we can assess how we have been influenced by the notions instilled in us by the violent state. Only then can we begin to rebuild.

—Caitlin Xavier

Weight of the Earth: The Tape Journals of David Wojnarowicz
Edited by Lisa Darms and David O'Neill
Semiotext(e). 2018
184 pages. | $16.95



David Wojnarowicz was a queer outsider, a visual artist and writer, author of the seminal *Closer to the Knives: A Memoir of Disintegration* published in 1991. He was also in a band called 3 Teens Kill 4. He was an activist, an identity that is closely intertwined with his work as an artist. He died of AIDS in 1992. His short film *A Fire In My Belly*, which features ants crawling over a toy crucifix, has twice been at the center of national controversy: in 1990 it was one of the pieces singled out by Jesse Helms because Wojnarowicz had received an NEA grant, and then in 2010 it was pulled from a show at the Smithsonian called "Hide/Seek" featuring queer artists. As a working artist, he lived in downtown New York and was an integral part of that 1980s edgy-queer-experimental scene that many still reminisce about. He was friends with the photographer Peter Hujar and actress / writer Cookie Mueller, among others. As that downtown scene became more involved in the establishment art world, Wojnarowicz moved towards the fringe, mostly by choice it seems, unwilling to participate in the hypocrisy of commoditizing subversion. As the taped journals illustrate, now published in book form in *Weight of the Earth*, Wojnarowicz was always questioning, always withdrawing into himself and thinking, perhaps too much. Nevertheless, he was

a very important figure in certain parts of the art world even back then. As David Velasco writes in his introductory essay "No Motive," Wojnarowicz was the "defining figure and patron saint of that age of annihilation," with "that age of annihilation" being the AIDS crisis. He was serious, self-conscious, justifiably filled with rage, and sweet and vulnerable, too. With the release of his taped journals in book form we get to "listen" to Wojnarowicz thinking out loud. The publication of these journals, along with a recent retrospective at the Whitney Museum in New York, signals that Wojnarowicz, in death, has moved from the fringes of the art world to its center. He is respected as an influential and revered artist, somehow respected by the art world establishment, and simultaneously as an icon of militant queerness.

The book presents four different sets of audio journals, two from the early 1980s: '81 and '82, and two from the late 1980s: '88 and '89. In the early 1980s, the AIDS crisis was just beginning, and it isn't mentioned in Wojnarowicz's journals from those times. When the 1988 journal begins, one the first things Wojnarowicz says is that he has been diagnosed with "ARC" (AIDS-related complex) and that Peter Hujar, his closest friend, had already died. One of the many striking things about the journals is how swiftly they move between some devastating thought followed by an abrupt ending. One moment he's talking about death, or the art world, or relationships, and then it's "Uh, that's it" or, even, "See you later, gator." As Velasco writes "we get to see something rare, an artist's transmission that doesn't come in an overused container..." It is a very intimate look into Wojnarowicz's life. It can also be random and humorous, but mostly it's a document of someone struggling to exist, both in a day-to-day sense, and in the sense of how to be an artist, a queer, a weirdo and to live that experience fully. For admirers of Wojnarowicz's work, this book is an opportunity to learn about his artistic motivations, desires, insecurities, fears, and dreams, in his own words. Prior to its publication, you would have had to visit an archive in New York in order to experience the journals.

The journals begin with a brief, ill-fated romance. Is it strange to begin there? No, because this is just Wojnarowicz documenting his life with a tape recorder. In among all the deep talk about art and the state of world, there are glimpses of his sexual desires and sexual frustrations and snippets of gay cruising culture in New York. Wojnarowicz describes how he meets this guy at a park and they start hanging out and he begins to develop feelings for him, feelings of attachment, and that makes him self-conscious. He struggles with his feelings and with the frustration of not knowing what the other guy is feeling. Interestingly, there are parallels in this relationship and with the rest of Wojnarowicz's life—the isolation he feels from others largely because of the harrowing experiences of growing up in an abusive household and being a street hustler when he was still a teenager. He struggles with his desire to be seen and understood but also his self-consciousness and desire to withdraw.

Dreams loom large in the journals. Wojnarowicz was very serious about his dreams, serious about remembering them and serious about documenting them. His dreams are typically bizarre, filled with reptiles and sexual longing. He recounts the dreams in detail. It can become a bit tedious when you just want to hear about his life and the New York world that he witnessed and participated in. But the dreams were important to Wojnarowicz and these are *his* audio journals. He didn't record them for us, but we get to listen in anyway.

The most powerful recurring theme in the journals is Wojnarowicz's notion of a "pre-invented existence," an existence "where everything is regulated—all movements regulated by people who exert control..." Wojnarowicz's art was often made in response to this idea that we are controlled by systems and ways of being that we have little chance to change or escape from. His rage against this pre-invented existence certainly does make him an artist for these times. It's not entirely bleak, though. On a more positive note, he says "the imagination is the key to breaking through pre-invented existence..." So, in the spirit of the David Wojnarowicz, pay close attention to your dreams and go make something.

—Kevin Darling

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(WN) Robert Collins

ACID TEETH – "Tie Your Own Rope" EP

Unremarkable hardcore punk from Seattle. Some of the guitar licks and breakdowns steer things toward post hardcore, but it remains middle of the road. Competent but largely uninspiring three-song EP. (MA)
(Snatchee)

AGATHOCLES / SLUND – split EP

SLUND's eight tracks of triggered, triggering, technical grind cover everything from who likes donuts to "Pill Cosby" to smartphones. Each track can be easily located by the unique and esoteric sample picked as its intro, before your brain is ground into utter mush. Their last song, "The Lowest of the Low," rules and starts with the best sample about stealing money from Girl Scouts because I think I know that person who wouldn't give a fuck. AGATHOCLES show up to work for the 500th time. Their stuff here is looser thrash and groovier than usual, but still overall mincing and repugnant. "Forced to Masturbate" was a good one. The cover is an open head pouring out brains. It's a fun split! (JR)
(To Live a Lie)

ARETHEYYESTHEYARE – LP

Rochester, NY prog-punk that is just enough over the line of punk that we can avoid the nasty comparisons to jam bands or drum circles, but I will still venture to predict that these guys like KING CRIMSON. The thing that usually turns me off of proggy stuff is the general lack of energy or enthusiasm, but these guys keep it up throughout the entire LP. Lots of noodly guitar riffs, but they temper it with memorable hooks that will stay in your head. (GH)
(self-released)

ASALTO – "Futuro Negro" EP

This is snotty, up-tempo hardcore from Argentina. At least one of these sounds like a messy hardcore band covering a HOT SNAKES song. At other times there is almost a NATION OF ULYSSES feel. The whole thing is driving and powerful but still melodic and catchy enough that you can dance to it. (PA)
(self-released)

ATERPE – "Eraikin Aintzinak" lathe cut EP

ATERPE sings in Basque but is from Thailand, and no, that wasn't a typo. This piece of plastic causes so much noise that I'm worried it's damaging my stylus. The music within the grooves is in a constant battle with the surface noise such that some frequencies seem to be cancelled out along the way. Stylistically it's fast hardcore and some breakdowns, but with cool awkward snarly vocals like SUDOR. Turns out you don't need some configuration of stompboxes in order to do raw noise punk—just lathe cut your own records! Four tracks all on one side, lyric insert with English translations, and two stickers! I'm surprisingly on board. (MA)
(Txori Ene)

AUREOLE OF ASH – "Morbid Reality" LP

Welcome to fucking grindcore hell! This 10" out of Germany delivers an unadulterated blast attack in the vein of BRUTAL TRUTH. It's like being caught in a supersonic vortex of bombed out buildings and charred skulls. There is one slow song, which is a riff-tacular doom smasher on par with early PARADISE LOST. This also features an INFEST cover, 'cause why the fuck not? Check it out! (BA)
(IFB / Halo of Flies / React With Protest)

AUREOLE OF ASH / JOTNARR – split EP

If you've ever wanted to be trapped in a small room with an out of control jackhammer, keep reading. Germany's AUREOLE OF ASH lets loose a relentless barrage of grindcore terror that's in league with NASUM. These four songs will have you dreaming of nuclear shock waves and pulling your hair out in chunks. The UK's JOTNARR offers up two maddening blackened crust rippers, emphasis on the blackened part. This shit is miserable, unsettling, and triumphant all at the same time. Don't miss out on this one! (BA)
(IFB / React with Protest)

BASEMENT BENDERS – "Shrapnel Songs" LP

These four Chattanooga punk rockers sound very familiar with garage and kitchen shows pieced together at the last minute. With member overlap from FUTURE VIRGINS and THIS BIKE IS A PIPE BOMB, you can hear those influences coming through loud and strong. I've said many times that I will always be a sucker for dueling male / female vocals, and this case is no different. Every aspect of this group is perfectly placed and balanced, like an unshakable punk Jenga tower. "Teenage Mary" and "That Day In The Back of the Parking Lot" are great tracks to start with. (RH)
(Dead Broke)

BABY GRANDE – LP

OK, fuck, this is pretty tasty. HoZac continues to be the only label still worth a damn. Seriously, how much garbage did we all have to sit through and forget back when Rave Up was doing it? Meanwhile this fucking scorcher is sitting forgotten on a shelf 'til 2018. BABY GRANDE was Steve Kilbey's first (Australian) baby before he was filling stadiums in the '80s with the CHURCH. Crunching swaggering glam punk that farts all over most of that bubblegum junk shop dreck. I would def pull this before I even contemplated trying to find that dang COLOURED BALLS LP, with no distracting ringburn on the cover to fret over. Sure there's some chooglin' throwaways here and there but this is the kinda shit we should all be listening to. (GB)
(HoZac)

BLACK CATHOLICS – EP

This sounds like if KILLING JOKE, SPINE WRENCH, ZYGOTE, and BIG BLACK played with TOM JONES's swagger and SAM KINISON's adrenaline. I really dig the echoing production with some warbled drum fills and the almost industrial clamor hidden within the chucky string punches. There's just one track per side and they both just sort of end, while the starts come at you as such a barrage of boot stomping goth you are probably not used to it. Interesting first outing that stands defiant against any sort of trendcore hyped deathrock. (JR)
(1407)

BLACK MAMBAS – "Moderation" LP

The four members wear black leather jackets and the cover photo is a switchblade, just in case you're the type of person who has to know exactly what the music is going to sound like before you even put the needle to the wax. This is straightforward RAMONES punk from four "rock'n'roll tramps" in Los Angeles. The drums start in on their typical beat and then just do that for eight tracks and a little over twenty minutes. This is exactly what it looks like with no swerves or dashed expectations. If there's room on your shelf for more of this, then you know what to do. (RH)
(Disconnected)

BLANK SPOTS – "Not My President" EP

Straightforward bouncy political punk blending the vocal cadence of Sid Vicious with the formulaic, four-line, rhyming verses of ANTI-FLAG. If you're a punk it should be taken for granted that Trump is not your president. But if there are people in punk who still need to hear it, then here it is! The sound is sincere and the performance is tight, but overall the record is a bit one-dimensional. (HB)
(Green Recordings)

BLOOD COOKIE – "Empty Your Mind" LP

I wasn't impressed with the generic album cover, but I have to say I'm pretty into this! Initially I thought they sounded like a more post-punk UVTV, but it definitely has a '90s alt throwback quality à la DINOSAUR JR. The bassist and the guitarist take equal roles in switching off vocals, which gives diversity to their sound. Their melodies predominantly have a dark, post-punk feel, but the guitar lacks the typical flanger and is played with more pop, creating a cleaner veneer. Pretty solid on both A and B. I'll certainly be listening to this again, and perhaps again, which doesn't always happen. (CR)
(MPLS Ltd.)

BLOOD PRESSURE – "Surrounded" LP

This record is all killer, no filler, and keeps you punching walls until the last second. Definitely one of my favorite hardcore records of the year, and a solid follow-up to their previous LP, *Need to Control*. If you're unfamiliar with the band, picture NEGATIVE APPROACH but faster and riffier. The band is comprised of Pittsburgh hardcore heavy-hitters who also play in CONCEALED BLADE, NO TIME, DIRECT CONTROL and others. On *Surrounded* they give their songs a little more breathing room. By that I mean they're groovier than the previous records, which I really like. The lyrics are punk as hell; standouts include "violent pigs on a power trip, leaders who insult your intelligence," and "they're banking on bondage, it's time to settle your debt." (AJ)
(Beach Impediment)

BLOODY HELL – "My Boss Ross" EP

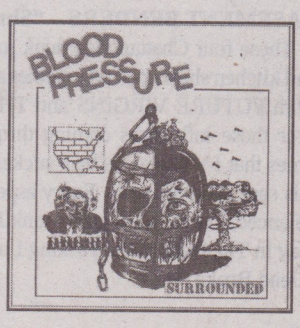
This is one of these records that I think is so good that I fear I might be losing my mind, since I've played it for nearly everyone I've come in contact with over the last few weeks, with largely negative results! "My Boss Ross" is the first song and the obvious hit, an aggressively twangy stomper about the singer's boss. (His name is Ross.) (The video for the song follows BLOODY HELL's singer as he gets a tattoo of Ross's email address.) (It's rossm@wallisgroup.com.au.) Mitch Cardwell, one of the few suckers who bit on my pushing of this record, accurately notes that it's got a real COUNTRY TEASERS feel to it; I can generally take or leave the TEASERS, but I'm all about this. Maybe because instead of doing ironic racism, it's about his boss, whose name is Ross. ("*My boss Ross / Hired me / I hope Ross / Doesn't fire me*") It's also got some heft to it, and a very Australian looseness. The other songs are pretty good too. Strong recommend! You might hate it! I love it! (MF)
(Spik & Span)

BOTTOM BRACKET – "...Is Something Else" EP

"Who Cares?" on the B-side of this record is a legit banger... straightforward, no frills hardcore that feels like it's a part of the '90s DIY basement scene. "Fire on the Water" and "Party Hats" feels a little more jokey and thrown together. The former feels like filler and the latter just doesn't sound completely fleshed out. This Colorado band plays mostly straightforward US hardcore, railing against jam bands, bullshit, and the state of this world. (GH)
(self-released)

BRAINOIL – "Singularity to Extinction" LP

A very timely release for this world mired in despair. After almost a decade of not recording, BRAINOIL drop a seismic bomb of crust riffs



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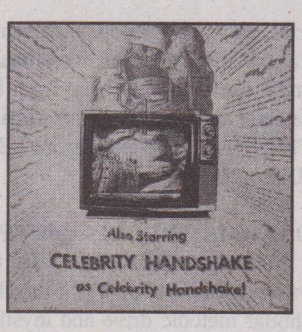


and death metal destruction. With the intense guttural vocals of BOLT THROWER or contemporaries NECROT, BRAINOIL pulverize with ease. The extremely depressive openers recall the sustain of GRAVES AT SEA, but the trio set all that aside for death punk putrid riffs and low vocals layered upon the lowest vocals. This is pit-churning death metal by punks, for those craving DYSTOPIA's misanthropy and ASSÜCK's nihility spliced with the thrash of early SKELETONWITCH and EYEHATEGOD's abysmal doom. The real oppressive stress of the less-privileged Bay Area comes through; do not mistake this review for fantastic role-play. The comparisons to '80s / '90s crust and death metal could go on into the far reaches of space, but what you need to know is that *Singularity to Extinction* is three musicians expanding into the emotionless void of a black hole. The artwork is reflective metallic ink on glossy black, so enjoy lining up your face with a cosmic reaper the size of Unicron. The artist Santos has been illustrating for the DIY extreme music scene for decades—I recognized his name from buying prints in the early 2000s. This long awaited LP in particular is essential Bay Area sludge crust and is beautifully designed. Smoke colored vinyl; favorite track "Blank Static Void"; don't miss it. (JR)
(Tankcrimes)

BRONXXX / SCHEISSE MINNELLI – "Swamp Bowlsessions" split EP

Wild ass split that takes me waaaay back to the early '00s skate thrash resurgence. Japan's BRONXXX take the funky fastcore approach of BREAKFAST and pile on tons of weirdness, like FUTURES and BIG BOYS fighting it out on stage and both winning. "Alright Already" is probably the single coolest track in this rag. Germany's SCHEISSE MINELLI are more straight ahead, skate ready hardcore, and are just as great. Exceptionally cool split. (WN)
(Beanies)

BURGER WEEKENDS – "Dead Romance" EP

A pop punk trio from Germany that writes love songs in the '90s Lookout! style that are literally about eating burgers. I don't think I could possibly describe them any more clearly, because if you can't decide if this was tailor-made for you from that description, you're confused about what you're into. Four fun tracks that know exactly what they are. (RH)
(Bartolini / Monster Zero / Wanda)

CELEBRITY HANDSHAKE – "That's Showbiz Baby! / Television Lips"

Finally CELEBRITY HANDSHAKE makes it to vinyl! I reviewed a CD by these guys for this mag back in 2016, and since then their raw, abrasive panic rock has grown on me by leaps and bounds. The music is rudimentary garage punk with some wild flourishes. The singer is menacing with a primal growl and humorous lyrics. The combination is perfect. Having this 7" is great. Now I'm ready for a LP. (CK)
(Eastern Prawn)

CHAOS BRINGER – "Turn into Ruins" LP

This is a group of death metal dudes out of Russia who are really into BOLT THROWER. It's not like they are simply influenced by BOLT THROWER, it's like they are trying to become BOLT THROWER. They sound exactly like BOLT THROWER, the lyrics are essentially the same warfare fantasy themes, and the cover art and band logo are very BOLT THROWER. As a matter of fact, the guy who did their artwork also does graphics for some warfare role playing game, just like...I don't need to tell you. All that being said, BOLT THROWER fucking rules! (BA)
(Civilization)

CHARLES ALBRIGHT – "Everything Went Charles Albright" LP

Like Sade and SADE and Alice Cooper and ALICE COOPER, Charles Albright and CHARLES ALBRIGHT return after what seems like a very long no records hiatus, but actually it's just been two years. As a singer, Charles Albright has never had the emotional heft of Sade Adu or the carnival menace of Alice Cooper, but he holds his own on this one, and CHARLES ALBRIGHT backs it up with some all-mids BLACK FLAG worship that will make you forget (momentarily) "By Your Side" and "No More Mr. Nice Guy." I once interviewed Charles Albright for a zine I never published called *Interviewvention*, which was supposed to be a collection of interviews about interviewing people, and during that interview, I only asked one question, "How many bands have you been in?," and that lead to a 45 minute recitation and discussion of all the bands Charles Albright has been in, which tells you three things: (1) Charles Albright has been in a lot of bands, (2) Charles Albright can talk a lot once he gets going, and (3) I am not very good at interviewing people. Also, Charles Albright owns a guitar pedal that is used by CHARLES ALBRIGHT, that when you step on that pedal, it says "Charles Albright" over and over and over and that's all it does. These details are pretty inconsequential, I know, but this might be the only time I'm ever asked to review a CHARLES ALBRIGHT record, so I thought I'd provide the Charles Albright context while I can. Anyway, if you've read this far into the review, you probably already own several CHARLES ALBRIGHT records and you're wondering how this one stacks up. Well, fuck, this record is the best! *Everything Went Charles Albright* largely ditches the meandering and overt weirdness from earlier records that, while pretty effective, caused the band to be lumped in, often needlessly, with now era garage. The vocals here, in particular, are dry, direct, and buried, which seems like a subtle difference from earlier recordings, but it makes the whole thing sound way more hardcore. As always, CHARLES ALBRIGHT's Greg Ginn obsession runs deep deep deep here (e.g., the LP's title, "Children of the Flag," a song dedicated to "Louie, Louie"), but, nonetheless, *Everything Went Charles Albright* doesn't have a clone-type sound, in the way a band like DEFECT DEFECT might (great band, FYI!). Even with the more straight ahead approach, in comparison to primo BLACK FLAG, *Everything Went Charles Albright* has a lighter touch, a little more pop, and much more Sacramento than its forebearer. My rules, buy this while dying. (MR)
(Sacramento)

CHEAP CLONE – "Barley Smile" EP

These four jangly, mid-tempo pop songs sound surprisingly refreshing despite the fact that it musically feels like '80s Athens, GA

(REM, LET'S ACTIVE, etc.) or '90s TEENAGE FANCLUB. Add to that a bit of a more modern pop punk feel that is reminiscent of the WEAKERTHANS (especially in the slightly nasal sung vocals) and you end up with a real catchy record. The songwriting is good, nothing crazy or out of the ordinary but also never boring. It's less punk than their LP from a couple of years ago but clearly better. (PA)
(Just Because / Peanut Butter)

CHEAP NASTIES – LP

Boffo excavation of Aussie punk slash!!! Perth '77 must've been brutal, as the unbridled viciousness heard here challenges just about any of their countryfolk from the classique era. No wonder, really: CHEAP NASTIES would bequeath the brains of both MANIKINS and the SCIENTISTS upon our unprepared species mere months after these recordings. Anyone hoping for the power pop sweetness (sometimes) characteristic of the above-mentioned off-shoots will be rightly disappointed...and fuck 'em anyway! You turn to this time and place for a chainsaw punk bloodletting, not a malted with your crush! CHEAP NASTIES deliver Murder Punk in pure form. Kudos to HoZac for doing this set proper justice. Buy or die. (MC)
(HoZac)

CLEVERS – "Said It's Where I'm Standing" CD

This sounds like something that would have come out on Simple Machines in the '90s, or on one of those KRS comps, maybe even on ArtMonk Construction! Shannon has a voice that reminds me of HEAVENS TO BETSY crossed with of the TARA JANE O'NEIL bands of that era? Or even Vanessa from SAMUEL / JUNCTION, really striking and powerful. Some of it is a bit earnest and "rock" for me, but I like the scrappier / punker songs that start the EP off. If any of that resonates, you should definitely check out CLEVERS' bandcamp! (LG)
(self-released)

CONVENIENCE – "Stop Pretending" EP

Given Jon's gnarly guitar playing in IRON LUNG, Alicia's role in REPLICA, and B's fucking incredible drumming, I was a little confused by the more conventional songs on CONVENIENCE's debut 7" in comparison to their other bands, but they tend to work pretty well with vocalist Dan's style, which weaves its way through the riffs pretty seamlessly. That's not to say that everything here is all meat and potatoes: there are multiple moments where the idiosyncrasies of their other bands shine through (check out "Press The # Key" or "Cash Crop" for some particularly good examples), but these tend to be brief moments, such as bridges and fills. Only one song mostly transcends the hardcore dynamic. "Invisible" is for the most part an almost grungy, midtempo piece that brings to mind PISSED JEANS' sluggish misanthropy, but it too reverts to pretty standard hardcore, even if briefly. Good, but I hope that the next release showcases the band's abilities a bit more than they do here. (JD)
(Iron Lung)

CRAZY SQUEEZE – "Savior of the Streets" LP

While these guys are definitely talented musicians, I think the focus here is on the fun and the rock'n'roll. The influences are many. There's rock, punk, power pop, and even glam. It's melodic and so catchy that they even sneak in the occasional handclap. Halfway through side one and I can't stop my head from bouncing. Jezus, it just keeps getting catchier and catchier. Think of bands like RED PLANET, EDDIE AND THE HOT RODS and the SWEET. Excellent record. (KK)
(Disconnected)

DAKHMA / PILORI – split EP

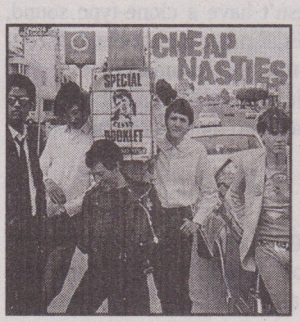
Michigan's DAKHMA offer up one track on this split, the crust-infused atmospheric black metal attack "Frenzy Witchcraft." With a similar melodic drive and mystic undertones as Minnesota's FALSE and Michigan's CLOUD RAT, there's an epic nature to this song that is undeniable and sick as hell. France's PILORI provide two songs that are not as cohesive but are just as strong. Ranging from full on aggressive assaults, atmospheric gloom, and mid-tempo chugs, their side shows a black metal band that's hungry and ready to rip the flesh from lesser bands. Both sides rule, so don't miss out on this. (JD)
(Dingleberry / Eastrain / IFB / Red Truth / SkatePizza / Terrain Vague / WOOAAARGH)

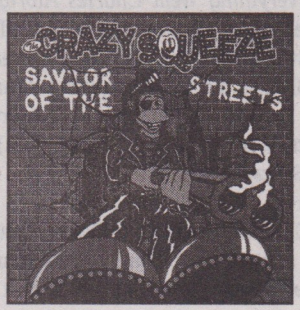
DISBRIGADE – "Susto" EP

I'm already predisposed to liking this record because it's named after one of the members' dog (RIP Susto!), and the fact that their logo is just the DISCHARGE and WOLFBRIGADE logos jammed together is also pretty charming. Fortunately, this is pretty fucking kickass! This Ecuadorean trio's sound is definitely more DIS- than -BRIGADE, driven by the tinny, piss-raw guitar sound and desperate-sounding vocals, mostly mid-tempo stompers with a few slower breakdowns in the mix. The recording has the same taped-together, ramshackle feel as the early D.H.K. records, which works perfectly with the material, and the playing is amateurish in the best possible way and the minor mistakes only emphasize the sincerity and urgency of the band. With eleven songs crammed onto the platter, you definitely get your money's worth! (AU)
(Pluteras)

DOG COMPANY – "High Hopes in Hard Times" LP

Being a father myself, I believe I have the license to say that this is total Dad Punk, which is *not* a pejorative. From the shout outs to kids and wives in the liner notes to the lyrical focus on the dangers of the world, this is punk from a mature perspective. Musically it's very late '90s or early '00s, with strong notes of DROPKICK MURPHYS, RANCID, and the harder-edged Fat Wreck bands à la NO USE FOR A NAME, featuring group-sung melodic choruses and lots of catchy guitar leads. The vocals are a tad over-sung for my taste (very much in the style of Al Barr) but that same quality allows the excellent lyrics to come through very clearly. Tackling issues like mass shootings ("World Gone Mad") and economic insecurity ("The Way," "Have a Drink"), and hilariously telling off conspiracy theorists ("No Foolin' You"), DOG COMPANY have a clear, well-articulated, and very respectable perspective. Points off for the lousy computer-generated graphic design, but then again, who has time to sit around with scissors and a glue stick when you've got a kid that needs to be picked up from preschool? (AU)
(Crowd Control)





D.U.D.S. – "Immediate" LP

Though Manchester's D.U.D.S. lace the largely melody-agnostic groove on their second LP with some analog synth gurgles and brassy horns, it never sounds overly harsh. Remove the trimmings and this lands somewhere in scratchy zone of the MINUTEMEN, BLURT, THIS HEAT, or SWELL MAPS in *Occupied Europe* perhaps. What wins me over here is the liberal use of cowbells, claves, and bongos on tracks like "Same Device," which gets loose and wild with the vocalist throwing out lines a little faster than he has breath for when it's not cutting to a profoundly un-funky A-FRAMES style break. It's just on the right side of the skronk line, though it ain't something that will win you any friends if you put it on your bar's internet jukebox to be sure—unless you live in Europe or Seattle or something. (EW)
(Opal Tapes)

EINERBANDE – "Bäume In Der Wüste / Munich"

Bizarro outsider synth-driven art punk A side with an absolutely *killer* dub track on the flip. That A side is weird, it's funky, and it features more instruments than I could possibly identify while those synths keep pushing the damn train forward—group vocal chants, excessive manipulations, and repetitive rhythms. But the flip...like, I can't even describe how crucial "Munich" is, even though it will (rightly?) turn off all the discerning cool punks. But that's kinda the point. Extremely compelling release.
(Tomatenplatten)

FAILURE – "Cross The Border" EP

Devastating fastcore / grind. Like SPAZZ, but faster. Like...*way* faster and with more pure fukkn blasts. There's even a perfect Lactose "oooohhhhh" at the beginning of "Cattle Wagon" to seal the deal... bassless and beautiful. (WN)
(Drinkin' Beer in Bandana / Here and Now / Mosh Potatoes Friend Club / To Live A Lie / Vleesklak)

THE FIEND – "Stand Alone" EP

Buy buy buy! That's really all that needs to be said, but for the curious this is a very high-quality reissue of one of the best and harder to find early D-beat EPs, right up there with the likes of DEATH SENTENCE's *Death and Pure Destruction* EP and the early VARUKERS singles. The FIEND fucked with a touch more melody than their heroes from Stoke-on-Trent (the guitar solos feel more UK82 than heavy metal) but it's still fast, hard, and will definitely crack your brain up! Four songs, every single one a damn hit, housed in a high-quality heavy stock reproduction of the original folding sleeve. If you don't already have this, you need it! (AU)
(Threat From The Past)

GIFTIGT AVFALL – "Punkoffensiv" EP

This is the *sixth* EP from this Swedish band since they first started releasing music last year. I'm not familiar with GIFTIG AVFALL at all, but the comparisons they've made for themselves with other Swedish råpunk (AVSKUM, TATUERADE SNUTKUKAR, TOTAL ARMSVETT) all ring true in these brief missives. The guitars are not overly distorted, the riffs are largely strong, the solos are atonal and not overly long, the vocals are harsh as hell, and the recordings are clear but pretty crude. In other words, this is a DIY winner, and indicative of a band that hopefully will continue to tighten their craft. Now if only a certain member would cut their white dreads... (JD)
(Anti Ljudkvalité)

GINO AND THE GOONS – "I Won't Fall in Love / Parasite" EP

Fun fact: Did you know that the current *MRR* content coord is quite possibly the world's biggest SUPERCHARGER nerd? It's true! This tidbit made me a little surprised to find this particular record in my review box. I assumed (I know, ass of you and me), that said coord would save all SUPERCHARGER-sounding bands for herself to review, but I guess I was wrong, because GINO AND THE GOONS is now in my hands! Sounding like SUPERCHARGER is, of course, no knock on the GOONS, as SUPERCHARGER may well be the best band ever (except for CRIME, and PIG DNA) and, further, to be clear, Gino and company don't sound *exactly* like SUPERCHARGER, they just, like, bottle the essence or something, which is, of course, the punk way to do it. Anyways, this is my favorite GINO AND THE GOONS record and I could listen to the echoed "heys" on side A all day long. Since this record player has an automatic repeat button, and I have nothing else to do today, that's probably what I'm going to do. (MR)
(Certified PR)

HAYLEY AND THE CRUSHERS – "Cool/Lame" LP

Self-proclaimed "Poolside Glitter Trash," San Luis Obispo's HAYLEY AND THE CRUSHERS wear their pink neon hearts on their sleeves. What you see is what you get; it's a sassy, cheeky, surfed-out BABY SHAKES with plenty of quirk. Definitely along the lines of something that Burger Records would put out. LP is a screaming shade of neon yellow. (CR)
(Eccentric Pop)

HARLAN T BOBO – "A History of Violence" LP

This has an eerie, almost VELVET UNDERGROUND-esque feel to it. The pace picks up and slows down, but there's a focus on the vocals, which are sometimes sung and other times almost spoken, and underlying darkness that permeates the entire disc. The record also has some great texture, with a scratchy guitar and piano playing a prominent role. The production is awesome. It almost feels like you're in the room with the band. I move from the VELVET UNDERGROUND to SERGE GAINSBOURG to even a little STOOGES. Excellent LP. (KK)
(Goner)

THE HOLDOUT – "The Things that Brought Us Here" LP

This is two-thirds of the band TEMPER AND HOLD and this sounds like it could have pretty easily just been that band's next record. While they probably can't get away from comparisons to later RAINER MARIA (and for good reason), this is heavier and what may be considered more rock if "rock" didn't have all the baggage of the

decades of dominance by shitty dudes. The songs have that mid to late '90s emo feel but are more driving and pushed by a solid rhythm section which supports guitar playing that largely stays away from chords and would be called sparse except for that fact that it still sounds big. All of that backs the powerfully sung vocals that really make this record stand out. (PA)
(Grafton)

HOLLER HOUSE / TECHNICIAN – split 10"

HOLLER HOUSE play lo-fi hardcore with an emotional tilt. Sometimes it's snotty and quirky and feels like the MONORCHID, sometimes it sounds like late '90s / Level Plane Records sort of stuff. The songs are pretty well done but the recording is a bit muddy and makes the songs sound a little too messy. TECHNICIAN come out with a straight mid '90s, Dischord style song in the vein of later JAWBOX or SMART WENT CRAZY. The next couple songs are similar but have more of an early SUNNY DAY REAL ESTATE sound. Unfortunately there are a couple time where they try to get real hardcore and it sounds like something rebellious teenagers might listen to in 2005. (PA)
(Jetsam Flotsam)

JIYUNA – "The Desolate Veil" LP

The Desolate Veil was recorded in 2001, and originally released on a tape and CD in 2002. At the time, the band / IFB didn't have enough money to give this record the vinyl treatment and only were able to do so in 2018, years after JIYUNA disbanded. This is metallic screamo with plenty of melodic breaks and technical moments of chaos. At their heaviest, JIYUNA takes me back to JOSHUA FIT FOR BATTLE or SOMEPLACE TO HIDE, while at their most melodic they hit the same emotionally charged melodies as FOUR HUNDRED YEARS or BRIGHT CALM BLUE. Tracks "Part One" and "Part Two" showcase JIYUNA in both of those modes. There are not many "chill" moments on the record—from the jump it goes hard with the chugs and octave chords. I appreciate this band immensely for many reasons: they are heavy and dissonant, the layered vocals, and overall intensity, but I really love that they were not afraid to throw in tasteful proggy melodies and breaks. From what I understand the original release on tape and CD came in a very intricate packaging, housed inside a block of wood, with a cloth / velcro covers. The LP version is no exception—the covers are on natural recycled paper, hand painted, and hand screened. To be honest, I have never been let down by IFB and their long roster of amazing artists. IFB is one of those rare labels that has been consistently doing what they do for the love of hardcore and punk. (RS)
(IFB)

KEVIN K & THE KRAZY KATS – "Just Say Yes" EP

Weird, I thought this was a record by Corpus Christi, TX '70s / '80s freak rocker KEVIN KAT, but no! There is a new KEVIN of KATS fame. I hope he is not from Corpus Christi. I'm actually glad it's not *that* KEVIN KAT, cuz that guy's records suck ass (all of them!). It is weird though, because this sounds a bit like you'd wish KEVIN KAT's records *would've* sounded like from the 1980s, in a kinda understated bar band / power pop / rock'n'roll way. This is pretty dope. Hand numbered out of 500 copies. (GB)
(Red Hawk)

L'AMOUR – "Look To The Artist 1978-1981" LP

I don't know what's crazier...a full-length from L'AMOUR, or a new release on Zero Degree Records?! Oh, L'AMOUR...I have a tumultuous relationship with Virginia's L'AMOUR. Their "Sunglass Party" was a longtime old timers' punk wantlist staple that took me years and years to track down (nowadays it's semi-common). Let's just say it didn't quite live up to a decade-plus of anticipation. Given fresh ears, the 45 tracks are kinda frantic, edgy pop punk. I'm happy to say Side A features six additional studio tracks (including demo versions of the 45). They're a showy revved-up moustache punk band, kinda like San Diego's CARDIAC KIDZ. Side B is six unreleased live tracks from 1980 that sound more like a demo than a show, with a more thugged out riffy DOLLS-y / DEAD BOYS guitar sound. Definitely shits on anything I can think of coming outta Virginia circa '79! Comes with a rad full-color foldout band history / lyrics / photo collage insert. If this sounds up yer alley, hurry up and grab one of the one hundred yellow vinyl copies direct from the label. (GB)
(Beach Impediment / Zero Degree)

LANDOWNER – "Blatant" LP

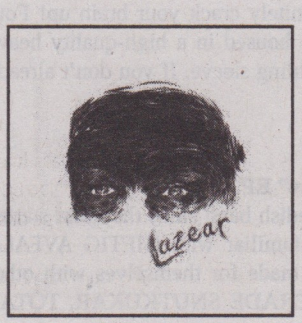
Propulsive FIRE ENGINES meets MINUTEMEN punk killers from Western Mass., hypnotic driving rhythm section with cool wild guitar skree and MINUTEMEN vocal inflections... Radical propulsive music that evokes nostalgic feelings but exists in the now collapse that is our current times. Really does sound like something SST woulda put out in 1983 (even the cover art somehow really reminds me of FIREHOSE in a cool manner), but with smart sardonic incisive political lyrics bringing us right back to the indignity of being alive in our modern world on fire times. Revolutionary sounds you can dance to! Sometimes bands that instantly evoke another era can be boring and reactionary sounding, but LANDOWNER are alive with pleasure! Really enjoying these party with me punker sounds, definitely worth instant investigation. (LG)
(Born Yesterday)

LAZEAR – LP

LAZEAR is both a little too proggy and a little too indie rock for my taste, but overall this is an interesting release. The record starts off pretty boring, but kinda captures me halfway through the second song. Once I was able to shake the BEATLES vibe and hear the SONIC YOUTH feel instead I could find a place for it in my ears. They have interesting guitar melodies, the rhythms are tight, with minimal changes in tempo, and they fuck with that soft / loud dynamic. "Rotunda" is definitely their strongest track, and overall the LP gets better every time I listen to it. P.S. Fuck the BEATLES. (RS)
(MPLS Ltd.)

LEOPARD PRINT TASER – "Teeth Are Not Bones" EP

It's hard to describe this record in terms of one genre or sound, partly because it doesn't fit into one box and partly because it's a little all



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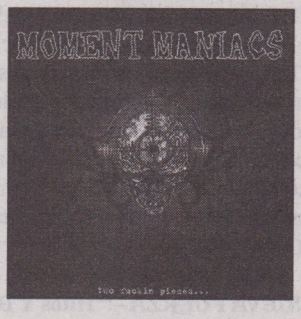
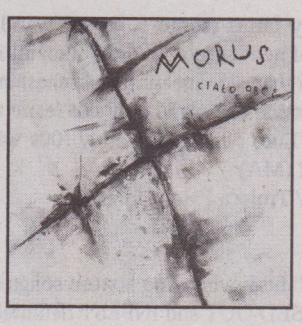




over the place. It incorporates '70s proto-punk grit and snottiness, gothy chorus effects, and dramatic soulful singing that creeps into R&B territory. The singer swings from aggressive shouting to tender singing, then the whole thing rebirths itself into full-on darkwave dancefloor debauchery. All four of the tracks are packed with dynamic changes, so there's likely to be something for everyone here, but also something that won't be everyone's thing. The final track, "Picnic," is the strangest and also the most exciting, with the singer talk-singing over mathy, technical, and somewhat atonal instrumental backing, then breaking out into sarcastic sentimentality. Definitely something to check out, even if only for that last track! (HB)
(Tor Johnson)

LES ROBOTS – "Do the Robot / One Way Ticket to the Moon"

Goofy space punk from the Netherlands! Will appeal to fans of outer space and exotica, strange robotic emissions for retro themed mid century modernists... Nothing here that will shatter the space time continuum, but a pleasant time to be had for sure... (LG)
(Spazz)

MALIGNANT TUMOR – "The Metallist" LP

Like MOTÖRHEAD and DISFEAR pounding beers on Sunset circa 1987, MALIGNANT TUMOR harness the best elements of epic metal-punk, fist banging hard rock, and uncompromising hardcore punk and deliver an absolute monster. Lyrics about being metal and being evil and the power of fukkn rock'n'roll, and a production worthy of an elite power metal outfit. It's so over the top that at times you wonder if it's tongue in cheek, but this slab is a complete monster. (WN)
(Unrest)

MASSGRAVE – "Our Due Descent" LP

I saw MASSGRAVE in Brooklyn a little less than ten years ago and completely lost my hat! Not an expression. And my way home. On *Our Due Descent*, Vancouver's MASSGRAVE offer more rupturing, ragged, crust punk rage. They bring a more organized hardcore sound than I recall, with plenty of galloping D-beat moments, short breaks into explosive mad blasts, and surprising death grind riffing. It's more mature than chaotically grinding out noise terror. The lyrical content focuses on our ever dysfunctional society, the lack of concern about the dying planet, the ever quickening reflection of a totalitarian pseudo "democracy" (looking at my home country), and even a few stand-outs about the positive aspects of the punk scene, holding on to it, helping out with it, and how it helps keep your sanity. (JR)
(Unrest)

MILK CRIMES – "II" EP

The first 20 seconds of this garage pop EP, particularly the killer bass line, are a salty appetizer that make you neeeeeeed this drink. All four tracks exude wonderful poppy warmness and joy. The guitars will rattle a musty garage dust smell out of nowhere and make you live in the sound. This UK group, lead by sweet, syrupy vocals, will befriend you while their music wins you over. (RH)
(Everything Sucks)

MISCALCULATIONS – "Sharp Solution" LP

This one-sided picture disc features stark red, black, and white artwork on one side and five tracks on the other. It has a fun early '00s anarcho-dance punk vibe, channelling both the most upbeat, dancey moments of BILLY CHILDISH and the super compressed vocal production and playful songiness of JAPANTHER, over MASSHYSTERI-style backup oohs and whoas. Synth beats and theremin are up front. I have a weakness for dirty dancefloor synth bass, so I can't help playing at least a couple of these tracks on repeat. (HB)
(Rockstar)

MOMENT MANIACS – "Two Fuckin Pieces..." LP

Reissue of the sole 1998 collaboration between members of MARDUK, ALLEGIANCE, and Tomas from fucking ANTI CIMEX, SKITSLICKERS, and WOLFPACK! People expecting D-beat will be partially satisfied, but those looking for a sound similar to *GBG 1982* will be totally disappointed: the tracks here are crusty as hell, with a detuned HM-2 guitar tone similar to Swedeath greats ENTOMBED or DISMEMBER. However, there are times, such as on "No Win Situation," where the riffs are so good and the delivery is so tight that if I just close my eyes, it feels like I'm listening to a tougher, more metallic *Scandinavian Jawbreaker*. The LP certainly could use a bit of trimming (especially the slower parts or some of the wah-wah guitar solos) but the majority of the tracks are solid. (JD)
(Unrest)

MOOM – EP

This is some furious hardcore out of Israel that has some seriously groovy undertones. When it's time to rage they fucking rage, but when it's time to break it down, they don't want to fight, they just want to stone out a little bit. However, this is in no way a mellow record. The songs are driving and well structured, and the vocals are dripping with indignation, putting this band above the pack. If you need a little blastbeat, they've got you covered there too. Sounds like an all around winner to me! (BA)
(La Agonia de Vivir / Bad Feeling / Lixiviat / To Live a Lie / WOOAAARGH)

MORUS – "Ciało Obce" LP

MORUS is a Polish supergroup of sorts with members of POST REGIMENT (including singer Nika!), EL BANDA, ANTIDOTUM, PRODUKT, and probably some more. Those of you concerned with this pedigree are certainly already aware of this release, or are pausing to seek it out before reading on. MORUS is dark, tight and gritty Euro hardcore punk. The mood elevates and falls, pushes and pulls, evidence that the arrangement was well-considered. Melodies appear to lighten the tension when necessary, but the tone remains depressive and angry, until the exhausted slowdown at the end of the last song signals it's all over. Nika's distinct biting vocal delivery is still commanding and epic. I've casually followed her cool and varied projects over the past few years so it's extra exciting to hear her fronting an aggressive punk band again! Sung in Polish, the lyrics are translated to English and challenge

contemporary societal norms, factory farms (some of us still care!), wastefulness in capitalism, traditional gender roles and the like, all in a uniquely personal poetic way rather than sloganeering and rehashing tired ideas. Younger *MRR* readers outside of Poland may not relate to this much, but anyone that was into Euro punk in the early '00s will surely be stoked on this immediately! (MA)
(Iron Man / Last Hour / Ruin Nation / Trujaca Fala / Unrest)

NAZI KILLER – EP

Great name. This powerviolence 7" fits a whopping sixteen songs in like eight minutes. Bands like CROSSED OUT and INFEST definitely come to mind. The production is gritty, as is the vocal style. I think if CROSSED OUT was around now and on Youth Attack, they would sound like this. The lyrics read like violent haikus. (AJ)
(At War With False Noise / Gronk! / Kids of the Lughole / Nuclear Mind / Samizdat, SuperFi)

NEIGHBORHOOD BRATS – "Claw Marks" LP

I'm never sure when—or if!—the NEIGHBORHOOD BRATS will come out of hibernation. Luckily they have, and this newest LP pretty much rules. It's a slight departure from *Recovery*, which was drenched with a sincere sense of urgency and savagery. *Claw Marks* still has talons, but comes off as more measured; it's more of an aggressive stride than a sprint. Rager's guitar continues to perfect aggressive surf, while Jenny's shouts and sneers take control of the forefront like vocal daggers. Complex baselines and precise drums without needless frills hold steady to their well constructed chaos. I'm hearing some serious '70s / early '80s L.A. influence in these rippers as well, with nods to the BRAT, the BAGS, and BAD RELIGION. My fave tracks are "Late Stage Capitalism," "Night Shift," "Nina's Ghost," and "Touching The Void." There's a serious sense of apocalypse in this LP—I hope that doesn't mean it's their last. (CR)
(Dirt Cult)

NEW VOGUE – "Birdcage (Slap Yourself Free) / Space Junk"

NEW VOGUE throws out two spacey, new wavey, machine-like post-punk songs that strive for a feeling of perfection (tight, un-sloppy) that manages to not feel sterile or lifeless, unlike a lot of music of this style. Truthfully, the music is practically jumping off the vinyl. Sometimes, they feel like a TOTAL CONTROL side project, but there is enough personality in NEW VOGUE for them to stand on their own. I feel like a lot of new wavey bands with processed drums don't attempt dramatic time changes, but they utilize this to create greater dynamics and more feeling within each song. Shit is good. (GH)
(Spazz)

NIBOOWIN – "Breathing" LP

Chaotic, epic, blasting emometalcrust. Listening to these folks construct (and then deconstruct) their songs is mesmerizing, and their approach to the (sub)genre is refreshing, even while they stay within arguably self imposed confines. Powerful. Very good. (WN)
(Dingleberry / IFB / React with Protest / Zegema Beach)

THE NIGHT TIMES – "I Don't Mind / Angel Of Love"

There's nary a psychedelic gang-vocal bone in the NIGHT TIMES' collective body, yet this racket still manages to fall squarely on the (actual) garage punk side o' the fence. They're seemingly content to let the fuzz and snarling do all the talkin', albeit a bit too hi-fi for my tastes. A more controlled approximation of TH' LOSIN' STREAKS? Very nearly. Still, this is a probable pleaser for all you clean-cut garage turkeys in *MRR*'s readership. (MC)
(Outro)

NUEVA FUERZA – "Hitos Y Derrotas" LP

Haunting, heavily distorted hardcore with GISM-esque delayed vocals, this strongly sounds like DESTINO FINAL. Lots of moshy, groovy riffs, but the effects make it sound so punk. The catchiness of the riffs remind me of HOAX, but it sounds much more evil, like ODIO or NEGATIV. Takeaway points: it's heavy, fresh and evil. (AJ)
(La Vida Es Un Mus)

PART-TIME LOVER – "Kelly Cruise Kelly / Shee-Ra"

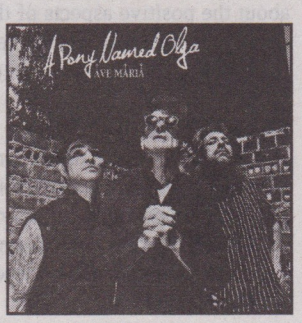
Tripped out synth tones over gentle, melodic indie rock. Influences ranging from the BREEDERS to *Piper at the Gates of Dawn*-era PINK FLOYD. The second track veers into more of a '60s lounge rock'n'roll vibe with sparse, reverb-heavy clean guitar tone. Even a little on the surfy side at moments. If you're super high this just might bring you to that special place, which might be an imaginary missing scene from the *Big Lebowski*. (HB)
(Just Because)

PERMISSION – "Drawing Breath Through A Hole In the Ground" LP

The second LP from this London group, a spiritual successor to NO in sound and style. Though relative to NO it's not as unhinged or untethered by someone's idea of what a normal "song" is, it still rips. Some songs score higher than others: "Frictionless" lets it all hang out, wild sounding riffs strung together out of every note in the chromatic scale, an elastic attitude towards keeping the tempo. If (*if!*) you like POISON IDEA, you might try to paint the picture somewhere between *Pick Your King* and *War All The Time*. Overall it only stands out when brakes finally fall off the bus with the last song, which begins with some KORO-caliber wildassedness and holds its breath for two minutes. Though I'm increasingly of the opinion that any hardcore song more than two minutes is too long by half, this is pretty good. (EW)
(La Vida Es Un Mus)

A PONY NAMED OLGA – "Ave Maria" LP

Whoa, these guys are old. Listening to this gave me weird flashbacks of seeing DICK DALE. This is a psychobilly trio from Berlin led by lead geezer Heini Heimpel, which apparently means something somewhere. I imagine this is what people who are wearing creepers in 2018 listen to. Like your best / worst STRAY CATS nightmare. They are probably amazing live. (GB)
(Saustex Records)



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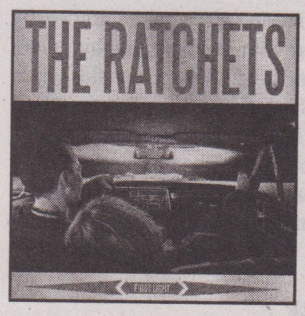
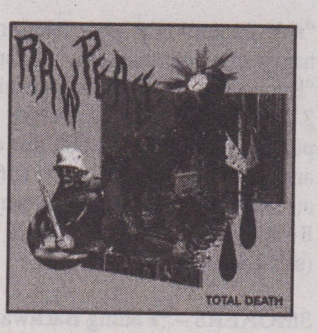
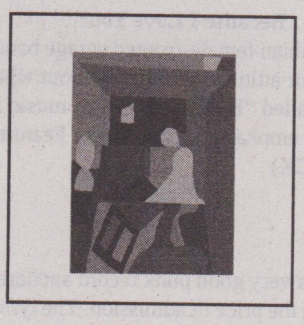
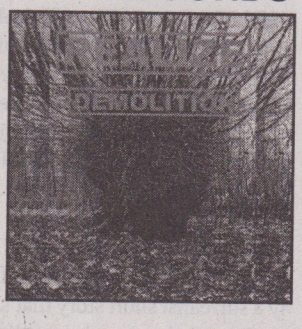








P.O.S. – "S.O.P." EP

Where on Earth did you cum from, my lovely? PERSONS OF SUBSTANCE (no, not lying) appear to be Belgian, so it ain't coincidental that their brand o' spunk-punk closely resembles that of HUBBLE BUBBLE and other notables of the Euro *Bloodstains Across...* class. Four fabulous tunes, each swirling down some nonsensical toilet—ESL lyrics centered on sexual tomfoolery, but with pumper performances that elevate the ordeal beyond novelty. In short, they fuckin' nail it front-to-back (Toothbrush and barbed wire on the sleeve? BRILLIANT!) and I'm smitten as all get-out, waitin' for a second helping. Fuck, one of the tunes is called "You Dropped The Banh Mi"...Let's just throw this lot a goddamn parade already. One of the year's very best singles! (MC)
(Goodbye Boozy)

PROLETARIAT PUNCH – "Intifada" EP

Full throttle political Euro squat shits. Hectic, manic hardcore presented with full sonic tonnage and vocals that teeter between desperate and sinister. (WN)
(Action Dancers Collective / Lukket Avdeling / Resistance)

THE RATCHETS – "First Light" LP

The first song on this LP, "Gotta Be Cool," immediately brought to mind PAUL SHAFFER's "Dress Cool." I hope that was intentional because it made me smile. The RATCHETS play sincere rock music. It is heartfelt, but not over the top, and reminiscent of their fellow New Jerseyan BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN or a post-CLASH JOE STRUMMER. The songs are anthemic and socially aware. I would like to like this more, but it's also rather wimpy. (CK)
(Pirates Press)

THE RATCHETS – "Gotta Be Cool / Rock & Roll" flexi

A cool looking flexi with a song from the RATCHETS' new LP and a cover of the VELVET UNDERGROUND's "Rock & Roll." Flexis are cool but annoying to play and the cover version is by the book. By the time you read this, it will already be a collector's item. (CK)
(Pirates Press)

RAW PEACE – "Total Death" LP

This Belgian gang offers up ten tracks of reverb-laden WW2-themed D-beat crust with a hyper-focus on the horrors of war. The sound is somewhere between WORLD BURNS TO DEATH and DISGUST (UK), more straightforward than the former and less purely DISCHARGE-focused than the latter, though they have a similarly expansive sound. The recording is extremely clean—perhaps a little too clean for the style!—and with the vocals a bit too prominent, mostly at the expense of the low end. It's a solid record but not a remarkable one, lacking a definitive hook or standout track that would elevate it from the pack of other similar bands. I imagine this band is much better live than this recording would suggest. (AU)
(Hypertension)

RAYS – "You Can Get There From Here" LP

If you're just getting to know RAYS, let me introduce you once again to this very good Oakland group, featuring members and alums of bands such as the WORLD, LIFE STINKS, DADFAG, the OILIES, and the BEATNIKS, none of whom they musically resemble too closely at all. On their second LP, RAYS retain the marks of Influencers® such as VU, SIMPLY SAUCER, the MIRRORS, or maybe TWINKEYEZ, but in-turn breezy and staticky contributions of the band's new full-time keyboardist angle some of these tunes into the more hazy and autumnal sensibility of Flying Nun / Xpressway bands like SCORCHED EARTH POLICY or the TERMINALS. The production here is a little cleaner than the last go-around, showing off a somewhat softer if not gentler RAYS than presented on their last LP. All the refinements add up to make this a weirder sounding record. Even when the drums and a guitar are put aside in favor of a viola and a saxophone on a track like "Veterans," the effect is stark and minimal and a little unsettling, JOHN CALE in the more somber side of his hockey mask-wearing phase. As in life, things don't get prettier as much as they get stranger. (EW)
(Trouble In Mind)

REALIZE – "Demolition" LP

Bedroom drum machine hardcore taken to legitimate next level status. GODFLESH comparisons are inevitable, but REALIZE is a fucking hardcore band and that antiquated 1992 drum machine makes this shit sound so weird. The chugs and churns are topped with demented manipulated vocals and this whole platter is indescribably *heavy*. All hail an artist who successfully goes back in technology and time to redesign the whole wheel and turn it into a steamroller. I keep listening, and *Demolition* just keeps getting heavier. (WN)
(RSR / To Live A Lie)

RIPCORD – "Harvest Hardcore" EP

Harvest Hardcore came out in 1988 at a very interesting moment in Brit-core history, the last gasp of the USHC-influenced style that ruled a certain segment of the British hardcore scene in the mid '80s before crust and grindcore became the dominant styles. Featuring covers of both SIEGE and SSD, the band proudly wear their influences on their collective sleeve. The other five songs are very much in the mold of those bands, though the blurry speed-over-everything approach of groups like NAPALM DEATH and S.O.B. is clearly evident as well. RIPCORD would double-down on the USHC influence on their *Poetic Justice* LP and would peter out soon after, drowned out by the more extreme sounds that their peers were embracing at the time. While that LP is a bit of a slog, *Harvest Hardcore* is undeniably a classic of the style, catchy and powerful with standout performances by vocalist Steve Ballam and drummer John Miller. Mastered from the original 8-track mixing masters, this sounds fantastic, much more rich and full than the OG. This reissue is in honor of the 30th anniversary of the record's release and most of the members that played on it are still active punks, playing in bands and releasing records. Amazing! (AU)
(Raging / YOFC)

RUN HIDE FIGHT – "He's A Jerk / Because I Love You"

RUN HIDE FIGHT are a Philadelphian female-fronted garage band. The vocals are tough girl, take-no-shit attitude with lyrics about what jerks guys are. The A-side is even called "He's a Jerk." The music is straight-ahead garage rock with an emphasis on the rock. Features members of the ORIGINAL SINS. (CK)
(Hidden Volume)

SAUNA YOUTH – "Deaths" LP

SAUNA YOUTH return, offering a very good punk record anchored by a surrealist short story that's worth the price of admission. The lyrics are in turn clever and unsettling, and songs like "No Personal Space" and "Theatre 83" throw down some catchy melodies almost in spite of themselves, sounding a bit like the JAM but shot with anxiety instead of speed. The YOUTH have a cohesively terse and buzzy sound, but command enough versatility to also send me to the pit for songs like "In Flux" and "Leisure Time," the latter a LAST RIGHTS-esque stomper for people like me whose favorite part of the holidays is the Verso Books 50%-off sale: "Leisure time, it's mine, it's mine / productive repose, sleep is a crime." (EW)
(Upset the Rhythm)

SICK THOUGHTS – LP

I assume the chainsaw is supposed to make him look menacing, but there is something about Drew Owen's smirk on this LP's cover that just makes me chuckle. Not to mention that he cleans up really nice. I wouldn't want to suggest he's also cleaned up his sound, but this record does sound less noisy and more (dare I say?) poppy. With titles like "Blood and Guts," "Acid Flashback," and "Total Mess," the lyrical content is still distressed enough that you know he hasn't mellowed out or anything. Twelve catchy songs with a panicky edge. It's perfectly unnerving. It's great. (CK)
(Goner)

SITUATIONS – LP

Riverside, CA's SITUATIONS plays '77 style punk / power pop in the vein of DEAD BOYS, PROTEX (they cover "Night of Action"), and the RECORDS. Their style is a fairly faithful throwback style, not really changing anything up at all. The delivery is a little...under-enthusiastic. The whole band overall sounds tired, except in brief moments like in "Back in Town" when they sing about fighting fascists. The songs are repetitive, which would be okay if most of them weren't over four minutes long. We don't need to hear the chorus five times. Maybe that's picky, but that's what I'm here for. If you like your punk tough, sweet, and in this style, maybe this is for you, but I feel like more editing could've happened. (GH)
(Burnt City)

THE SMOG – "Accelerator / Runaway Child"

These Osaka punx count members of LIQUID SCREEN, FRANTIC STUFFS, and ZERO NUMBERS in their ranks...A truly royal pedigree when it comes to modern Japanese punk!!! Do they deliver? "Accelerator" is a great take on classic UKDIY sounds, guided by heavy rhythmic thumping and sprinkled with stabbing, pubby guitar. "Runaway Child" is the true high-flyer here: arty guitar slash à la ZYMOTICS somehow merged with hooky, very-nearly-power-pop punkin'. How did they pull this off?!?!? Add an ace handmade sleeve and criminally limited pressing (100 copies!) to the mix and we have an aesthetically and sonically perfect Flat Tire Punk slab on our hands. Be still my bloody fuckin' heart! Very mightily recommended! (MC)
(self-released)

SMOKERS – "Falling Backwards" EP

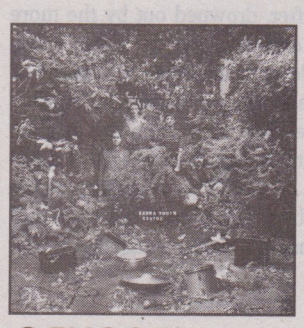
Oakland's SMOKERS seemingly appeared out of nowhere with fully formed, confident, and instantly catchy songs. There are hints of power pop, tempered by years of the members' time in disparate facets of the local punk scene. Don't be scared off when I say "power pop"; SMOKERS play punk with melody and the enthusiasm of hardcore... like finding pure gold on one of those Very Small records comps from the '90s, but still urgent and relevant enough to hold your attention in 2018 and beyond. All three songs are essential and timeless. Ex-members of NUISANCE, BLACK FORK, DRUNK HORSE, TALK IS POISON, and many more. I'm not presenting that ex-members list as a reference point, but more as a proclamation that these folks know what they fuck they are doing. (GH)
(Mouth Magazine)

SPIDER CREW – "Sounds of Hatred" LP

This is exactly what you would expect from a "hardcore" "band" "from" Vienna and New York. It just sounds like SICK OF IT ALL. Recycled hardcore complete with shit-tone and shit aesthetic! *Yay*! Lyrics that may or may not fringe on some white supremacist bullshit. I actually got a good laugh because I googled "SPIDER CREW racist" and a statement from the band's Facebook popped up. They had to declare that they were anti-racist, anti-Nazi, and anti-fascist because they were getting dropped from shows and fests for being sus. In the letter the singer Sean talks about how they are a "true multicultural band," but then later writes about one of their songs called "Blue Blood Warrior" and I quote: "[This song is about] my forefathers and the forefathers of everyone who have helped build a democracy and sweated out blood working hard every day for what we have and enjoy today, freedom and choice." You can't just pat yourself on the back, make some wild ass statement of "Hey, look our band isn't all white so, we / I can't be racist!" then honor the forefathers, use iron crosses, talk about about pride and honor and how all PC punks are pussies, and then expect the international punk community to not question you. Anyways, your record is boring. (RS)
(Crowd Control Media / Mole Photo / Spook / Straight from the Heart / Vienna Style Empire / Vienna Style Hardcore Family / WTF)

STIGMATISM – EP

This EP is virtually a tribute to AGNOSTIC FRONT's *United Blood*, and if you love that record as much I do this is definitely worth picking up. The NYC- / Montreal-based group fit nine songs on this 7"—most



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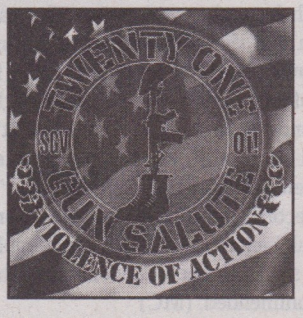

are around a minute long and include a breakdown. Nothing but mosh. Though a lot of bands have tried to revive that early '80s NYHC sound, *Stigmatism* is a standout. They do it in a way that's both gritty and well-written. (AJ)
(Beach Impediment)

SUBSONICS – "He's A Keeper Of The Fire / You Don't Know What's Going On"

I like the SUBSONICS' style. They play nonchalant garage rock with a bit of attitude. The singer has a distinctive voice. There are two covers on this 7", BUFFY SAINTE-MARIE and EXUMA. It's a cool record. (CK)
(Hidden Volume)

SWEATSHOP BOYS – "Two Men" LP

I make a promise to myself that I will listen to an entire record straight through and not skip any tracks when reviewing. This made me really want to question that method, as I barely made it through the half hour without screaming. The band themselves describe the music as "an existentialist day dream for all those who stare at the abyss and spit right into it." It's like a quote stolen directly from an overzealous Philosophy 101 student. This is music that is supposed to be upbeat and make you feel good, but in reality, it rings hollow and is uninspired, faux deep, and ear puncturingly dull. At times, I couldn't even hear a mediocre power pop group and instead heard a half-ass pastiche of the COUNTING CROWS. (RH)
(Rockstar)

TEENAGE CAVEGIRL – "They're Gonna Get You / Psychotic Reaction"

Snotty two human cable access garage sound, demolition derby CRAMPS, you can picture the leopard print and pointy shoes required to make this noise as it pounds out of the speakers. Danceable destruction dreams for big city cave girls. The cover version has a *Girls in the Garage* appeal that will make you forget the rent is due. (LG)
(self-released)

TELEPHONE LOVERS – LP

Devout power pop, as if the design aesthetics utilized weren't a dead fuckin' giveaway. Just kiddin', this is powerviolence. Anyway...I hesitate to smear shit across something so earnest, but this is definitely a totalitarian take on tradish' Quad-P sounds, rigid and without much breathing room. It's not bad (there are hooks, the production fits, etc.), it's just formulaic to point of cringe. If they have any unique slant at all, it's their infusing of obvious Collins / Case / Lee ape-jobs with recognizable glam / junkie angles...which itself seems fairly predictable. They could very well prompt some young'un to venture down the power pop rabbit hole (a worthy service—there *is* gold in them thar' hills!), but here in the Rickenbacker Rest Home, we've heard it all before. (MC)
(Disconnected)

TELEPHONE LOVERS – "Two Dollar Baby / Real Action"

Authentic sounding '70s-style radio rock that isn't trying to make your ears bleed with saccharine hooks, but instead focuses on getting your hips to shake shake shake. "Shake" is even a lyric. The picture of jeaned hips on the cover probably helps in this hip-shaking regard. A retro band name, with retro band sounds, and retro band themes, this 7" is a more-than-solid follow up to last year's LP. Would Johnny Thunders like this record? I don't know the answer to that question! But, regardless, this 7" should be gobbled up and adored by all wild-eyed advocates of danceable power pop. You know who you are. You're the ones who like the SCIENTISTS, but only the SCIENTISTS' "early stuff." (MR)
(Burger / Disconnected)

TWENTY ONE GUN SALUTE – "Violence of Action" LP

Ignorant patriotic street punk alert! Covered in Amerikkkan flags, stock crucified skinhead drawing, and a photo of the trio aiming their firearms at the camera. One song attacks fence-walking skins while also using a homophobic slur, and "Stars and Stripes" claims the flag belongs to them and not "the right," while exclaiming "fuck anarchy, fuck a commie, better dead than red." "Fish and Chips" is about shooting his "old lady" after walking in on his brother fucking her, and "Mommy Oh" is...an ode to his mother? This shit is dumb as hell and the music ain't even catchy. (MA)
(Crowd Control)

ULTRA RAZZIA – LP

Québécois Oi! of the highest order. By the time you're into "Catatonique," if you're still listening then you are hopelessly hooked. These are sounds that are, by now, timeless more than classic, and ULTRA RAZZIA deliver the goods from the first note on the self-titled debut long player. The guitars are a swarm and the vocals harness that essential gruffness—every song here will make you bounce and want to sing along. Nothing new here, just pure quality. (WN)
(Foreign Legion Records)

THE UNBEARABLES – "I Want You to Want Nix / I'm an Evil Bear"

This is the deluxe version of the collected *Pander Bear* comics, which were originally published in 2011 and 2012. The package comes with not just the comics but also this lil record. The premise of *Pander Bear* is that a man dresses up in a panda costume and unapologetically pushes Nix comics, a joke that tires out immediately. Pander Bear is shown acting reprehensibly, including being a fucking scab, just so he can make a sale. *Blech.* It could have been *OK* if there were good jokes, but unfortunately they tend to be as entertaining as learning the nuances of the Dewey Decimal system. The record is just as bad: a double cover EP with the lyrics to be about the Pander Bear character. If STIV BATORS were alive, he would be just as livid as CHEAP TRICK should be about being *forced* into a relationship with this boring character. A shitty pun shouldn't be the whole basis of your *main character* in a comic, let alone your fucking *record*. (JD)
(Nix / Used Kids)

VANITY – "Evening Reception" LP

Third LP from this shape-shifting New York lot. I took an inoffensive dump on Vanity's prior outing, but the copious winks thrown throughout

Evening Reception are refined enough for real consideration. The trad rock angle from their last LP (glam and diet Britpop modifications notwithstanding) is largely carried over here, but their new jump is head-first—a very willing adoption of that middle-era, purple V-neck, Super Bowl™ ROLLING STONES snort & strut, circa *Tattoo You*. It's almost like they dare you not to call them on it, but I'm too boogie-shamed not to. You could lie to yourself and deny them, but then you'd miss out on a pretty hot-shit guitar record (the addition of Mike from BUZZER and VEXX adds some real fuckin' class) with memorable songs to boot. Big sounding, big-time stuff, but not without merit all the way down here in punk's gutter. Recommended. (MC)
(Beach Impediment)

VECTOR COMMAND – "System 3" LP

Wow, this is the sort of thing you buy without thought, an unreleased early '80s synth punk record by former members of San Francisco's only rock'n'roll band CRIME?! Spectral soundscapes that make as much sense now in our endtimes reality as they did when created in Reagan's craven golden arches of unreality. Spaced out paper thin synth doom that feels after hours elegant and fucked up at once, taut outré funk for people that find LIQUID LIQUID too pop? A must buy for all midnight maniacs, up all night sounds made by up all night people. Basement economic-fi to soundtrack the decline of your meager mind. (LG)
(Hozac)

VODOVO – "Ataraxian / Neuer Code"

Nagoya, Japan's VODOVO throws out the typical guitar player in favor of two basses and drums. Side A is a mid-tempo, creepy post-punk rocker with deep vocals that sound like Peter Murphy. On the first listen, it felt like a throwaway, but the repetitive bass line easily gets stuck in your head and rattles around for the day. "Neuer Code" is more frenetic, but the monotone, nearly emotionless vocals remain, which create a stark contrast. Really interesting and worth your time. (GH)
(Killer Boy)

VOICE OF DOOM – "Toxic Swamp" EP

Hmmm, I suspect Lyndhurst, NJ isn't far from Lodi. The hype sheet makes it sound like it's some "swamp" tribute record(?!?), but this is surely just an excuse to wax some straight-up MISFITS worship. To be honest, this is not as shitty as you would guess. It's kinda gothy *Walk Among Us* era DANZIG / early SAMHAIN (sadly no bells!) on swamp colored vinyl. I am slightly curious whether this is 20-somethings or 40-somethings, though in the end it probably doesn't matter. If they were smart, they woulda got some EERIE VON or KRYST THE CONQUEROR tie-in so every MISFITS completist would have to buy it, but I guess this one's just for the VOICE OF DOOM completists! (GB)
(Pyrrhic Victory Recordings)

WARWOUND – "Burning the Blindfolds of Bigots" LP

Holy moly, this art fucking *sucks*! Looks like an early '00s grind record on Relapse. C'mon dudes, y'all grew up in a scene that produced some of the most iconic punk art of all time, surely you can do better than this corny-assed Photoshopped cliché garbage! Fuck! WARWOUND are an interesting case when it comes to reunited bands. Started in 1982, their first iteration was a very short-lived group founded by future members of SACRILEGE and VARUKERS that played a few gigs but never recorded. Original member Damien Thompson (of both VARUKERS and SACRILEGE) rounded up a bunch of mates to perform under the WARWOUND name in 2015, including bassist and preeminent UK punk historian Ian Glasper and vocalist Rat (VARUKER of course). Sadly, the band just isn't very good. It's not actively terrible, there's just not a lot to hold your interest and the sound trends much closer to the STAMPIN' GROUND style of metallic UK hardcore than the band's UK82 roots. The highlight of the record is a cover of SACRILEGE's "The Closing Irony" with Tam on vocals but fuck, there's already a really fuckin' great recording (leagues better than this one) of that song with Tam on vocals: the one SACRILEGE did *thirty-three years ago*. I have tremendous respect for everyone involved with this project but I just can't recommend it. (AU)
(Unrest)

WEAKENED FRIENDS – "Common Blah" LP

Very clean and slick, with influences ranging from HOLE to GARBAGE, MODEST MOUSE, and WEEZER. While it has some melodic pop punk moments, it leans more toward the kind of rock they'd be playing on the radio if they still played rock on the radio. There is a lot of talent here, with pro-level songwriting and catchy melodies likely to appeal to grunge fans, but the affected singing style with accentuated gasps between lines rubs my DIY punk sensibilities the wrong way. It's a little too far towards the SOUNDGARDEN meets GWEN STEFANI end of punk to feel authentic and relatable. (HB)
(Don Giovanni)

V/A – "American Oi! Texas Edition" LP

Well, this is kinda what I expected from a compilation of Texas Oi! bands. There are six bands in total, which each bring something slightly different to the table, but stick pretty close to the tried-and-true Oi! / street punk formula. Some of the songs on here are a little boring and formulaic, but there are definitely some standouts. I liked "On the Attack" by DRASTIC ACTIONS and "All Laced Up" by the BOOKED, both of which sort of reminded me of CAREER SOLDIERS-era street punk. Overall, it's fun and easy to grasp, which is what the genre is all about. They're songs to drink and circle-pit to. (AJ)
(Crowd Control Media)

V/A – "Destroy All Art Vol. 2"

Wow—the first volume of this *Killed By Death*-style comp of '90s punk non-hits wasn't bad, but this one is a real step up, truly killer throughout. That *KBD* comparison is consciously set up by the design of the record, but there's also just such a direct line from those '70s Holy Grails to songs like the SECULARS' "Social Skills." Unlike the records featured on *Killed By Death*, though, which were fetching high prices even before being chosen for the comps, most of the tracks here are, as the back cover notes, "chok[ing] bargain bins" across the

country. The BABYSITTERS' CLUB's contribution here, "Surfing Queen," has long been a favorite of mine; I think I paid somewhere in the neighborhood of $3 for the record it was initially released on. And there are plenty of tracks here that are just as good or even better! It's great to be able to pick up the originals so cheap, but the fact that these records are so underappreciated really does bum me out—at 31 years old, I'm not aware of many people my age who are really interested in this style / era of music, to say nothing of people younger than me. But the tracks featured here really do get to the heart of just about everything that excites me about punk music: they're sloppy, stupid, annoying, unhinged, and just about every other supposedly negative adjective that suddenly becomes a positive when you're talking about punk rock. Here's hoping this comp manages to drum up some long-overdue appreciation for these songs. (MF)
(Rock N' Roll Parasite)

V/A – "Killed by Meth #3: Rust Belt Rockers"

Third entry in this comp series of trashy, lo-fi garage punk outta the Rust Belt. None of it's *bad*, but by side two, it all kinda starts to blend together. WLMRT's contribution "Deathsticks Ruined my Life," actually rips, but it took me a minute to figure out what band I was listening to by that point, ya know? Other standouts include the energetic KNOWSO track, LOST SYSTEM's "Late at Night" (a refreshingly Midwestern spin on synthy post-punk) and, as expected, MUZZY's contribution, "L.I.E." MUZZY sounds almost exactly like Jeff Mahannah's previous band, the overlooked, brilliant / moronic I GET MYNZE, so truth be told, their track is kinda why I wanted this record in the first place. "L.I.E." features cryptic lyrics that I'm informed are "secret codes about *Fresh Prince*, Uncle Phil." Worth the price of admission for this brief moment of glorious idiocy alone. (MF)
(It's Trash!)

V/A – "LEVO 10 Ace Band From The Lucky Country" LP

I just returned from a trip to Australia so what a pleasant surprise to read the liner notes to this compilation of Australian bands and know every detail of what is being discussed. I also bought records at Greville Records and drank Young Henry's beer (Newtowner for me) plus many more fun things while visiting that great place. I can understand the pure joy the MPLS Ltd. crew have for the country and the music on this compilation. There are ten bands playing modern psychedelic music, which to me is more comparable to shoegaze and Brit-pop with some '60s flairs. The bands are the BAUDELAIRES, LAPSE, MOODY BEACHES, DEAD RADIO, the BLACK HEART DEATH CULT, the MORNING NIGHT, WILD MEADOWS, OV PAIN, MOTE, and SLUDGE PARTY. It's a nice compilation. (CK)
(MPLS Ltd.)

V/A – "One Family One Flag" 3x12"

Wow, a three-12" comp! There's a lot of music on these records, which celebrate 200 releases on the Pirates Press label. Bigwigs include COCK SPARRER, STREET DOGS, and the OLD FIRM CASUALS. There's a mix of Oi!, street punk, and ska. It kind of brought me back to when I was a kid, first getting into punk and flocking to bands like these. But I've grown up, moved on, and some of this really doesn't hold my attention now. I don't buy records from these bands anymore, but listening to all of these songs together really brought up some fond teenage memories. Congrats on putting out 200 records, Pirates Press! (AJ)
(Pirates Press)

V/A – "Trouble With a Capital T: 1980s Punk & Underground Music From Florida's Capital City" LP

The title pretty much says it all, though an important detail is that most of the tracks (with the exception of HATED YOUTH's) were culled from demos and rare cassette releases, or just previously unreleased. It's expertly curated with memorable offerings from SECTOR FOUR, the SHAKES, PAISLEY DEATH CAMP, PERSIAN GULF, SQUID ROW, KNOW-IT-ALLS, FAITH IN MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY, and of course HATED YOUTH. A little power pop, a little hardcore, post-punk, and even a deathrock inclusion from GOTHIC PLAYGROUND. Plenty of *Bloodstains* and *Killed By Death* quality tracks. The last couple even veer into more metallic territory, but still stay on the punk side of the fence. Would I recommend this comp? Yes! (MA)
(Panhandle Punk)

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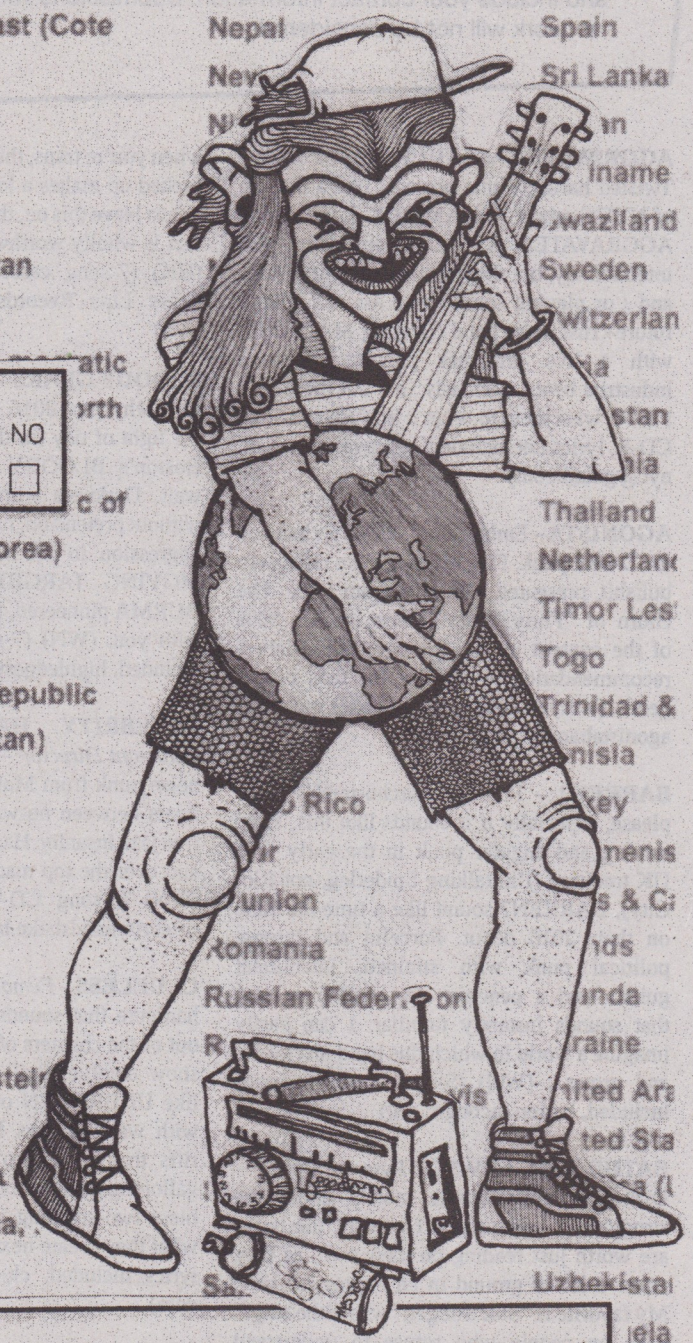
Tankcrimes: tankcrimes.com
Teenage Cavegirl: teenagecavegirl.bandcamp.com
Threat from the Past: give-em-hell.com
To Live a Lie: tolivealie.com
Tor Johnson: torjohnsonrecords.com
Trouble In Mind: troubleinmindrecs.com
Turbo Staat: turbostaat.de
Txori Ene: txorienerecords.bigcartel.com
Unrest: Suite 239, 10654-82 Ave, Edmonton AB, T6E 2A7, CANADA, mail@unrestrecords.com, unrestrecords.com
Unrest: unrestrecords.com
Upset the Rhythm: upsettherhythm.co.uk
Used Kids: 2500 Summit Street, Columbus, Ohio, 43202, (614) 421-9455, usedkidsrecords.com, info@usedkidsrecords.com
Vienna Style Empire: viennastyleempire.tumblr.com
Vleesklaak: vleesklakrecords.com
Wanda: mailorder.wandarecords.de
WOOAAARGH: wooaaargh.com, info@wooaaargh.com
WTF: wtfrecords.eu
YOFC: yofcrecords.com
Zegema Beach: zegemabeachrecords.com

CONTACTS

MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL

REMOTE RADIO

	YES	NO
DOES YOUR TOWN/REGION/COUNTRY HAVE A PUNK & D.I.Y. SCENE?	☑	☐
DOES IT HAVE A PAST AND PRESENT THAT NEEDS DOCUMENTING?	☑	☐
ARE YOU PASSIONATE ABOUT THE MUSIC AND KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT ITS CONTEXT?	☑	☐



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DEMOS

All cassettes and CD-Rs are reviewed in this section. Send yours to PO Box 460760, San Francisco, CA 94146 USA and include your contact information. Submissions without artwork will not be considered.

(GH) Greg Harvester
(HK) Hungry Kat
(MA) Matt Badenhop
(JR) Jason Ryan
(MR) Matt Reynolds
(RS) Ramy Silyan
(WN) Robert Collins

AGGRAVATED ASSAULT – *The Struggle* – Twisted hardcore that presents like a dervish of NYHC mixed with AMEBIX. I don't think AGGRAVATED ASSAULT are doing this intentionally, but those guitars are out of tune and / or playing some weird ass shit...like a future-crust noise band covering MADBALL with a live drummer playing repetitive industrial beats. Seriously...it's out there, and I never want them to reign it in. (WN) (2-song CD-R, lyrics not included, aggravated.assault.nyc@gmail.com)

AGONISTA – *Embusteros* – Deadly, clenched fist D-beat punk. Five blasts of pure rage, zero bullshit, presented with maximum force. The churn of "Forty Years" alone smokes 90% of the content in this (or any) rag. Highest recommendation, especially for fans of the genre. (WN) (5-song cassette, lyrics included, agonistaband@gmail.com)

BARREN? – French Anarcho-punk? Yes... please, especially if it sounds like this. Hard driving and angular punk in the early '80s UK tradition (I'm talking Spiderleg, not Riot City), BARREN? sound like a time machine on their 2016 debut. Forceful and intense political punk with strained, intentional guitars and a penchant for writing a song that sounds instantly familiar. I can easily imagine a world in which this band just grows and grows... (WN) (5-song cassette, lyrics included, barren.incongru.org)

BATHROOM LAWS – *Pyss in Peace* – Dystopian noisy tracks mostly about the struggles of being trans. Honestly, the lyrics are worth just reading on their own, as they cover a lot of ground in an expressive way. My favorite is "Slur Slinger," where the singer shits on people who refuse to understand the violence they are committing. Another classic: "paint a smile on my broken teeth with shit." The guitar is free and experimental, and the tracks that have bass and drums have pretty standard no wave grooves. Given this backdrop of ugly, fucked up shit that happens when you're trans, this tape sounding ugly and fucked up makes a lot of sense. Don't expect to just leave this on, this is intentional listening that is wholly worthwhile to give yourself to. (HK) (7-song cassette, lyrics included, % Crass Lips Records, radientradet5@gmail.com)

BLOODY GEARS – *Shallow Remains* – Not sure why this 2016 recording is just seeing the light of day (in these pages, at least), but Boston's BLOODY GEARS are worth the wait. Darkness without wallowing, anxiety without pretension, tuneful without sacrificing aggression in the way that their forebears MOVING TARGETS and MISSION OF BURMA pioneered, these are songs that stick with you. (WN) (7-song cassette, lyrics not included, highledgestapes.bandcamp.com)

CELEBRITY HANDSHAKE – *The Reluctant Director* – Fukkn *insane* free form noise punk from Maine. Complete chaos that floats between no-wave freedom and all out free jazz insanity. Hazy psychedelic freak outs and over the top madness; highest accolades. (WN) (5-song CD-R, lyrics not included, celebrityhandshake.bandcamp.com)

CLUELESS – *Female Hysteria* – Hard hitting hardcore that sounds like something straight out of the chapters of the Che Cafe Collective show archive. Evil octave chords that chug like UNBROKEN or STRUGGLE complete with walking bass lines, and head nodding riffs that burst into emotional breakdowns, galloping punk beats, and yes, two-steps. God bless two-stepping in 2018. Excited to hear what they create next. (RS) (5-song cassette, lyrics included, cluelesshardcore.bandcamp.com)

COACHWHIPS – *Night Train* – John Dwyer is like the Kawakami of garage punk. Distorted, blown to shit, and (most important) truly original hi-energy bangers that stand head and shoulders over the hoards of bands doing it by the numbers...sounds kinda like DISCLOSE, right? I'm just saying. Listen to the tweaks on the title track and "Tired Of Wasting My Time," and know that the engine driving this cacophony is one of genius. Like dragging the modern era kicking and screaming back to the '50s when rock'n'roll was at its most primal, COACHWHIPS bridge(d) genres and generations by stripping punk down to the barest of essentials. *Night Train* is a collection of demo cuts and outtakes from their first four full length platters, and deserves attention for fans and detractors alike. (WN) (19-song cassette, lyrics not included, girlsville.bandcamp.com)

CORRODE – *Age Of Ruin* – Latest in the seemingly endless stream of face melting supergroups from the Boston area, CORRODE feature members of VACCINE, SIAMESE TWINS, AMPERE, SUCCUMB and deliver six jaw dropping blasts of fury that justify their pedigree. Buzzsaw EQs on all of the mids and highs mean that Meghan's vocals are constantly fighting to kick the shit out of the guitars, creating an intensity that only driven harder by the rhythm section, who also seem like they are doing battle as much as they are playing in a band. It's hard to tell if CORRODE is pissed at each other or just fukkn pissed, but *Age Of Ruin* is unquestionably fierce. Six tracks in seven and a half minutes; mandatory. (WN) (6-song cassette, lyrics included, corrodehc.bandcamp.com)

DELETER – *Levitate The Pentagon* – A full "album" release relegated to the demos section due to somewhat arbitrary (though arguably necessary?) format-related limitations, DELETER have delivered an undeniable masterpiece. Ominous, thunderous and calculating after-punk that sounds like a modern incarnation of things that you already love. The dreary monotonous chorus to the simple seeming "Kill the Comedian" belies the complexities that lurk in the crevices of this entire recording. A Richard Butler-caliber rasp to the vocals and an uncanny ability to

make a complete song by combining otherwise incongruous parts. Sharp, atonal indie if you want it in a nutshell, but I suggest digging into the meat on this one. (WN) (14-song cassette, lyrics included, 25diamonds.com)

DETOXI – *Death Of A Nation* – Was fortunate to see DETOXI in the flesh this summer, and I'm chuffed that their recorded matter lives up to the live show. Classic sounding Southern California dark punk, harnessing TSOL, CIRIL, 45 GRAVE while continuing on the trajectories mapped out by their previous bands MAÄSK and CATHOLIC SPIT. Vocals take center stage, a new wave lilt that gives way to sinister sneers when the music demands, and the music does demand. "Death Of A Nation" will be the winter anthem for anyone who pays attention. These kids know exactly what they are doing, and they do it very very well. (WN) (5-song cassette, lyrics included, detoxi.bandcamp.com)

86'S – *The Fire Next Time* – While I question the point of a one song CD-R single, there's a place in this world where fans of DEAD MOON and Motor City proto-punk will meet and talk about how much this rough ass bluesy number tickles their collective fancy. (WN) (1-song CD-R, lyrics included, the86srocknyc@gmail.com)

EXTRAVISION – *Demo* – Dreamy goth post-punk is pretty much all I have to say here. The guitar tone is cool and the drums aren't boring, but there is nothing urgent about this, it's forgettable. And the songwriting is good! But the production doesn't really suck me in, and I keep wishing the vocals were either washed in effects or had something interesting that didn't feel like placeholder vocals. And it sucks because I could totally see this band making music that I will enjoy, with more intentional production. But for the demo, the band puts it best: "I feel like I'm wasting time." (HK) (5-song cassette, lyrics included, extravision.bandcamp.com)

FOD – *Sound Defects* – The JAM pisstake sleeve art concept pretty much falls in line with the non-stop wackiness therein. FOD is FLAG OF DEMOCRACY from Philly and has been cranking out goofy hardcore since the early '80s. Among the hysteria on this cassette is a folk punk song, a MONKEES cover, and a cover of some *Sesame Street* song I was unable to identify. These guys are cool, but as a casual FOD listener I did not enjoy this. (MA) (7-song cassette, lyrics included, srarecords.bandcamp.com)

FUTURE STORMS – *No, Not Really* – Garage grunge from a two bass, one-man home recording project. It's earnest, the drums drive the whole thing hard, and the roughness settles in after a few tracks to reveal some genuinely interesting tracks. (WN) (4-song cassette, lyrics included, futurestorms.bandcamp.com)

GHUM – *I am The Storm / Undone* – Post-punk that feels a little more eerie and spooky than other post-punk I have come into contact with. They describe themselves as "atmospheric dark pop," and I think that's really spot on. This tape is well done, and the songs sound solid and well executed. This band is definitely driven by melody, with less emphasis on the guitar and more on the vocals, bass and drums. When those guitar leads hit they really creep in and linger. Good tape, but I was I was left wanting more. Nothing truly stuck out to me. (RS) (2-song cassette, lyrics not included, ghum.bandcamp.com)

GRAVEL – *Except For Me* – Bold move starting a demo with drums that are this out of whack, but it sets the tone perfectly for GRAVEL. Sharp, disjointed punk along the lines of CONDENADA, but with a decidedly mellower, catchier bent that makes them sound extra unique. It's harder to hide lurching, awkward drums when you slow it down for the hooks, and that combination is exactly what has me hooked. (WN) (9-song cassette, lyrics not included, c/o Let's Pretend Records, PO Box 1663, Bloomington, IN 47402)

GRUDGEGRIND / WARTHOLE – Blistering, no bullshit low end grind from GRUDGEGRIND (I mean, you could have guessed that, right?). Ruthless tracks and presentation – it almost makes me uncomfortable how relentlessly they approach their grind. And then on the flip? It's more of the fukkn same from WARTHOLE, but with a tinge of hardcore from the vocals and presentation and a weird tweak on the mix that focuses on the snare and the guitar (also, I think these fools actually play *faster* than GRUDGEGRIND, which is hard to imagine, much less explain). If you like to grind, especially if you like your grind to come from punks, then consider this Indonesian split essential. (WN) (9-song cassette, lyrics included, grindtoday.com)

HABAK – *Un Minuto de Obscuridad No Nos Volverá Ciegos* – Amazing melodic crust from Tijuana, Mexico. This EP crushes it. It is dark, moody, angry, melodic, fast, and heavy; everything I want from a crust band. There are many layers and textures. They switch back and forth between beauty and chaos at their leisure, leading you in and out with long drawn out songs that feel both like closure and deep emptiness. I got the chance to see them in Oakland a couple of months ago and they are absolutely unstoppable live. For fans of EKKAIA, HIS HERO IS GONE, and FALL OF EFRAFA. (RS) (4-song cassette, lyrics included, habak.bandcamp.com)

HEADLINES – *MMXVII* – New York's HEADLINES deliver heartfelt punk with immediately infectious lead vocals perfectly suited for shower singing. I'm reminded of Oakland's YEAR OF THE FIST, with top notch anthem-punk songwriting. (WN) (5-song cassette, lyrics included, headlinesbandnyc.bandcamp.com)

HEADSPLITTERS – *Demo / Tour tape 2017 / EP 2018* – A pummeling hardcore assault from NYC that sounds like Finland trench-core from 1982. Very sincerely; HEADSLITTERS sound like MELLAKKA, SHITLICKERS, and BLACK FLAG through filters of noise and optimistic hardcore modulation. If you haven't gotten into them yet, get into this intro tape. It's got everything. Sheer NYHC awesomeness (yeah I know, let's not go there). (JR) (14-song cassette, lyrics not included, blacxkonflik.blogspot.com)

HELLSHOCK – *Single collection + bonus tracks* – Shit, who doesn't love some HELLSHOCK! I have most of this, but to crack it up on cassette, flipping for some part of the miserable day, is quite the stenchcore treat. The PDX band has been around for almost two decades, with some time off, and then returned with some surprisingly devastating shows. Always rough, brutally metallic crust, that draws from several inspirations with some of the best lyrics of this generally aggressive style. Personal, poignant. This is a collection of their split tracks, EPs, and compilation tracks. If you never got into HELLSHOCK I definitely recommend picking up this tight lengthy tape and putting it on. Topical. (JR) (19-song cassette. Lyrics included. blacxkonflik.blogspot.com)

HOLY GRINDER – *Cult of Extermination* – Brutal, noisy, industrial grind that is not nearly as metallic as its excellently satanic artwork would lead you to believe. Scary, but not frightening, which is aces. The main rub here is that the vocals consist almost entirely of grunts, belches, and "yeeeeeeeeeeeeah" over and over and over. These syncopated vomits wear quickly and end up detracting from the blasting drums and other batshit craziness, ultimately making *Cult of Extermination* seem less interesting than it actually is. Really, is it so hard to just throw in a few more actual words here and there? Like, scream "vegetables!!!" or something.

DEMOS

Just make some shit up or whatever. There are millions of words available to you. I understand I am probably missing the point and HOLY GRINDER is using its paucity of lyrics to make a point about how humans are actually the most animalistic of the animals, or perhaps they are tapping into deeper, non-verbal emotions, or maybe they're just nerdishly emphasizing the voice as an instrument, but whatever the fuck, I prefer "vegetables!!!" (MR) (11-song CD-R, lyrics not included, bruxismrecords.bandcamp.com)

HOLZKOPF – *House Of Azud* – Measured chaos with repetitive '80s industrial rhythms. Extremely powerful demo in the veins of early NINE INCH NAILS, but much fuller and harsher than Reznor was able to manifest in his adolescence. Excellent. (WN) (7-song CD-R, lyrics not included, holzkopf.ca)

THE HUNG-UPS – *Insanity Plea* – Quality pop punk in the finest '90s tradition; SCREECHING WEASEL, the QUEERS and the like. Catchy, derivative, and ultimately pretty fukkn good—like FACE TO FACE (first LP only!) with a teenager singing. (WN) (5-song cassette, lyrics included, thehungups.bandcamp.com)

JOLLYS – *Sweet Freak* – JOLLYS plays some decent surfy and fuzzy beach pop, but unremarkable in the end. This isn't a sound I really seek out either, so maybe some people like this stuff a lot more. There are well executed riffs and lyrics I've heard before over quality production, and it's really listenable. The thing with this sound is it's so hard to distinguish yourself because there isn't much left to do with this genre. Hopefully this band keeps doing what they want even if it's not making any waves in *MRR*. (HK) (10-song split cassette, lyrics not included, jollysmusic.bandcamp.com)

KEPT IN LINE – Cavernous hardcore that benefits (and / or suffers) from a bizarrely lo-fidelity cassette reproduction, making this sound like an unearthed relic from decades past. A peep on the internet reveals that the band's intent is much more in line with current crops of fierce HC stomp. Vocals treated to a natural sounding hollow room instead of mindless effects, and these Texas boys have riffs for days. Choice cut: "The Divide"—that breakdown into the almost melodic finish... *ooof*. (WN) (6-song cassette, lyrics not included, keptinline.bandcamp.com)

KHOBRETTI – *Neolithic* – Meat and potatoes suburban hardcore, KHOBRETTI do a great job of bringing the fire. I found myself trying to remember something noteworthy after my listen was complete, but there seems to be more of a focus on the overall sound than the tracks themselves which is not necessarily a bad thing. The JOY DIVISION reinterpreted as SoCal bro-core? That was a bad thing. High energy live sets follow the demo; I see promise here. (WN) (6-song CD-R, lyrics included, khobretti.com)

KING SEXY – *Open Wide And Say EWW!!!!* – Sad sack dad punk that takes "I can't get a girlfriend because I'm a dork" to eye rolling heights. Shades of KING MISSILE and other so-nerdy-and-rudimentary-it's-art fodder, KING SEXY are certainly not without their charm (like when they unleash for "In Sexycolor") and I re-visited "Horny Geekboy" more than once. (WN) (11-song CD-R, lyrics not included, kingsexy.banmdcamp.com)

LOOSE VEINS – *Final Thrill* – This is a solo project by a Finnish guy named Joni, and I'd put it more in the alt rock camp. Somber and melodic instrumentation unintentionally recalls the ESTRANGED, but more melodramatic and cleaner in production. Vocally he maintains a fairly monotonous yell. I respect a self-indulgent expression like this but I'm not finding it to be moving in any way. (MA) (3-song cassette, lyrics not included, looseveins@gmail.com)

MCHY I POROSTY / TORPUR – Nasty and cavernous off the rails hardcore from TORPUR; it's loose as fukk and that's kinda the charm. Tons of effects on the guitar and vox makes for an extra weird sounding recording, and when they open it up with speed and bizarro guitar melodies at the same time it is sincerely badass. MCHY I POROSTY on the flip deliver repetitive rhythms and blissed out jams covered with a blanket of very uncomfortable electronic sounds. It's like an attempt at beach sunrise cool down tunes but some tweaker has a death grip on one of the channels on your mixer. Yeah...it's good. (WN) (10-song cassette, lyrics included, torpurpunx@gmail.com)

M. MARTIN – *A Harvest Of Ice* – Perfectly executed '90s college radio rock a la MERCURY REV, ROBYN HITCHCOCK and MBV, interspersed with underwater dub and brilliant psychedelic soundscapes. There's a shameless innocence that holds you close, but ultimately it's a batch of well crafted songs that are worth your time. (WN) (11-song cassette, lyrics not included, rareplant.bandcamp.com)

MUSAVI – *November Rehearsals 2017* – YESS!! When AI creates music with algorithms that perfectly define our tastes, this is how mine will sound. This is *punk* and it goes everywhere you don't expect it to. There honestly could be some plot arc that I'm not noticing. Angular, dirty punk rhythms that MYSTIC INANE would play if they were more drunk or more ignorant. There is no other sound like this! The feeling of biking through city traffic fucked up and almost dying but simultaneously feeling more alive than any fucker in a car. When punk ends in San Francisco pretty soon, I hope this is the final band the tech capitalists throw into the bay. (HK) (11-song cassette, lyrics not included, musaviband.bandcamp.com)

NÃO SOMOS NADA – *Você Perdeu + Ao Vivo Aurora* – Trying to find the words to properly describe it, but I just keep listening instead. File under wild clean guitars and a distinct PAGANS vibe, with a really choice vocal warble throughout and maximum energy at all times. So fukkn punk beyond words, I just want more. This is a cassette release of a 45 from last year and a digitally available live set from early 2018. Seek this shit out. (WN) (11-song cassette, lyrics included, nosomosnada77.bandcamp.com)

THE NEGATIVE BOYZ – Raw ass teenage boredom realized, the NEGATIVE BOYZ take MISFITS-style starter punk, stumble it up and give it the ramshackle don't give a fukk treatment, then throw in the occasional damaged blues rock guitar solo. Handmade clip art covers and a generally weird vibe. (WN) (9-song CD-R, lyrics not included, no contact info)

NO REASON – Right out of the gate, NO REASON is ripping. They play USHC with so much energy and enthusiasm that it makes me feel pumped! GORILLA BISCUITS, AMDI PETERSENS ARME and (early) 7 SECONDS are good jumping off points for the style that these fuckers are throwing into their mix. They incorporate riffs that almost feel *too* busy, which adds to the momentum that never lets up through this demo. The lyrics are on point, railing against the idiocy of money and fighting the fucking fascists who are trying to beat us down. So fucking good! I wish there was contact info and I wish this band wasn't so hard to search for online! (GH) (9-song cassette, lyrics included, no contact info)

NOTHING BAND – *Anarchy 99* – This is one of those tapes that should come with a manifesto, because I have no fucking clue what is going on here. I mean, I get that there is experimental guitar / horn noodling and a minimalistic drum and casio keyboard here and there, but I don't get why. The cover is

a blob of black and the titles and credits are listed, that's about it. And it sucks because I feel like there is something going on that I'm ignoring because the art is cool and it's from Max of PREENING, etc. But all this is to my ears is dicking around on a distorted tape machine, which is no scarcity. Next time I want some weird shit to alter my reality or keep my parents out of my room, I'll opt for something with subtleties I can follow. (HK) (9-song cassette, lyrics not included, nothing-band.bandcamp.com)

NOTHING BAND – *Descension/Digestion* – Prolific under-the-radar solo recording project from Max Nordile (PREENING, VIOLENCE CREEPS, the BLUES, many many more), NOTHING BAND bridge vast expanses of avant damage and irreverent no wave, tweaking a collection of messes until they align momentarily in some indescribable cohesion. On the edge of complete disaster throughout, consider NOTHING BAND worth your time and / or patience. (WN) (14-song cassette, lyrics not included, decoherencerecords.com)

THE NUCLEAR FAMILY – *Live In Japan* – True freek sounds from Australia. No wave by way of BIRTHDAY PARTY with an incredibly uncomfortable saxophone... and then they get fast and it's like a SICK THINGS record skipping. Very very ugly. (WN) (?-song cassette, lyrics not included, urgerecords.bandcamp.com)

NOXEEMA – In a world of hyphenated-punk, it's fucking refreshing to get a legit demo tape from Portland's NOXEEMA, who are just straight up *punk*. Beaming into your stereo like a tinny alien transmission, they sound like they're channeling snippets of KLEENEX, LOST KIDS and early Indiana punk but filtering it through their lens of all the DIY basement bands who saved your life in the past twenty years. The lyrics convey a realness of the sense of dread that comes with getting older and being slowly pushed out of all the places you love and worked so hard to build in your life. Ugh! I love it. Members of DEFECT DEFECT, the STOPS, CHASED AND SMASHED and more. (GH) (8-song cassette, lyrics included, c/o Erin Yanke, PO Box 1113, Portland, OR 97207)

NYLEX – Yesssssss to this. It's like your typical '80s 4AD by way of guitars and your modern day rebirth of goth vocals, but the presentation is fast and on fukkn point and the drive starts instantly with "Decide." I decided (get it?) to listen to all of the tracks at an increased volume—imagine a rhythm section processed so it sounds like the manufactured drums on "Temple Of Love"-era SISTERS with heavy COCTEAUs vibes on the vocals. The sound is 100% unique, even in the context (and confines) of a somewhat derivative subgenre, but file Australia's NYLEX alongside Boston's SIAMESE TWINS, SF's RANK/XEROX and Brasil's the COMPLETERS for reference and a designation of quality. This is excellent and demands excessive listening. (WN) (6-song cassette, lyrics not included, nylextenthcourt.bandcamp.com)

POINT OF CONTACT – *Undefeated* – Old school east coast SXE metalcore. Think back to BURST OF SILENCE, early '90s uncompromising and unforgiving 'core. Mosh calls? Yes. Dive bombs? Definitely. (WN) (5-song cassette, lyrics not included, pointofcontacthc.bandcamp.com)

SACRED COWS – *Bigly* – A Trump themed, Trump inspired, primarily Trump fronted disc. Track one is a simple ska beat backing a collection of some of the more mind blowing / numbing soundbites from our very own would-be Dear Leader (it must be hard to just isolate three minutes of material, considering the subject matter). Next is a terrifying and extremely well done modern take on DK's "Kinky Sex Makes The World Go 'Round"—such a palm-meets-forehead "why hasn't someone already done this?!" moment, and this version was worth the wait. There's one SOCKEYE-esque (or SPITS meet Bryan Adams on 'ludes?) track to close things out (internet research tells me this is actually what the band does with themselves) but the real treat here is the first two. I feel like SACRED COWS could easily base a career on this model. (WN) (3-song CD-R, lyrics not included, sacredcows1.bandcamp.com)

SAILOR POON – *B-Sides and Rarities* – Somehow with only one cassette release and an EP, this band has enough material to release a B-sides comp. Austin's SAILOR POON (which is thankfully *not* comprised of men) walks a line between new wave inanity, art jazz and post-punk. Some of the songs feel confident and fun, while others feel like a joke that feels not totally fleshed out ("Gimme That Sax" and "Turkey Trot") or a weird commercial ("Hummus"). I feel like the more jokey songs on here probably translate better when played live, but have a hard transition to tape, which leaves you with a half-solid release. Still, fairly more interesting than a lot of stuff we get. (GH) (10-song cassette, lyrics not included, pecancrazy.com)

SEE//GET – *Dream Vacation Harsh Conclusion* – Ambient, manipulated and subdued percussion creates a foundation upon which a palace of harsh electronics is painstakingly constructed. There are moments where the cacophony lulls you into submission, but the majority of this release is intentionally and successfully angst inducing. And awesome. (WN) (2-song cassette, lyrics not included, no contact info)

SENSUAL WORLD – Dense and brooding punk from Richmond, VA. Thick and heavy like STREET EATERS, with a WIPERS pulse and strumming, and Julie's voice recalls the soulfulness of Mia Zapata. It's a really pretty but grungy sound, like a more unhinged PLEASURE LEFTISTS. Despite all the comparisons it actually sums up quite uniquely and I dig this a lot. (MA) (5-song cassette, lyrics not included, sensualworld.bandcamp.com, Vinyl Conflict Attn: Kris, 324 S. Pine St., Richmond, VA 23220)

SICK BURN – Three quarters of Sacramento fastcore darlings RAD pick up right where RAD left off. Tongue in cheek but serious as fukk, they take just eight minutes to blast through eight songs that serve as a reminder that escape is important, even when the present demands your attention. That fun is important, even when they world around you is serious and terrifying. And thrashing? Well, thrashing is just important. Great tracks, lightning delivery, zero pretense—if you like it fast, then this SICK BURN is exactly what you need. (WN) (8-song cassette, lyrics included, sickburn.bandcamp.com)

SOAKIE – *Dangerous Doge* – Screaming 1-2-1-2 hardcore with a pace that is exhausting. It's like that plodding bounce / stomp that all the kids love...but its fukkall *fast*. Like JUDY & THE JERKS meets the COMES, and the lyrics are straight fire. Top notch. (WN) (7-song cassette, lyrics included, soakie.bandcamp.com)

S.O.S.S. – Wild Alabama 4-track garage punk. The reverb is swampy and the either the tape itself is a little fukkd up (because, DIY) or the Tascam they used to record this shit is a little fukkd up (because, also DIY), but either way it sounds extra psycho-delic and demented. But these aren't some calculated retro dark punk come-latelies, it's just honest free form punk recorded live in studio with (and on) regular (read: cheap and probably shitty) gear so it sounds...well, honest. Very fukkn good shit. (WN) (7-song cassette, lyrics not included, ssoss.bandcamp.com)

STATE OF FRANKLIN – *Mistakes Were Made* – Tough here to describe what it *is* instead of what it is not; it's not interesting, it's not energetic, it's not memorable, it's not

DEMOS

DEMOS

proficient, it's not noteworthy in virtually any way. It is mid-paced, it is a blender of '90s indie / alt / DIY influences... it might be fun if they are your friends and you are drunk. I'm fukkn trying here. I swear. The lyrics and intent are clear, but sonically, I feel like this is "punk" by default and not by design, and very awkward to listen to. (WN) (10-song CD-R, lyrics not included, c/o Girth Records, PO Box 13, Geneva, NY 14456)

SUCK LORDS – *Second Lords Tape* – This band keeps the snotty-techy-fast-as-fuck punk coming! I was a huge fan of their first tape and I am excited that SUCK LORDS is keeping the creative juices flowing. Clocking in at just under the six minute mark, this band just goes all in. Just unapologetically fast, keeping switch ups tight, and guitar riffs quick, punchy, and to the point. They remind me of all the snotty LA punk bands from the '80s except with a massive adrenaline rush to the central nervous system. Think CIRCLE JERKS or the ADOLESCENTS, except way faster. This tape is five new songs "recorded live across the street from Sassy's on Karl's 4 track." Oh yeah, apparently you can only listen to this tape via Youtube now since it's sold out and nowhere else to be found online. (RS) (5-song cassette, lyrics not included, snukytate@gmail.com)

SVARTFÅGLARS BEGRAVNING – *Darker Than Before* – As the title suggests, Brazil's fiercest one-man export delves a little deeper into a goth-crust underworld, flirting with "Sign Of the Wolf"-era PENTAGRAM on a couple of tracks in the context of their trudging slogs through dark, metallic crust. "Run Like Hell" is the metalpunx burner here, but Fofäo's attention to detail throughout is frightening. If the past is any indication, prepare to keep your eyes peeled for countless more offerings (already two more that I know as this issue goes to print). All hails. (WN) (8-song CD-R, lyrics not included, svartfaglarsbegravning.bandcamp.com)

SVARTFÅGLARS BEGRAVNING – *The Darkest Night/The Darkness Inside Us* – What to do when you've mastered the world of one man raw D-beat projects? Move on to the world of one man raw metal-crust projects and commence to owning that realm as well. For more than twenty years, Fofäo has been setting the standard for raging and raw D-beat with BESTHÖVEN, but last year he started releasing dark, bludgeoning mid-paced crust as SVARTFÅGLERS BEGRAVNING. This disc compiles the first two releases, and if the track "Sex, Blood and Luxury" is any indication (hint: it is), the raw one-man treatment does the subgenre well. Shades of a would have been glammed out AMEBIX, but delivered in Fofäo-fidelity and with a distinct UK punk undertone...and the RAMONES cover is a nice touch. (WN) (8-song CD-R, lyrics not included, svartfaglarsbegravning.bandcamp.com)

TEST – Well, this is interesting. Electronic punk from synths and drum machines and ultra-fuzzy strings. Metal changes and industrial delivery. Lots of things come to mind: MLWTTKK, NIN, MINISTRY, GODFLESH...I haven't kept up with hard industrial trancewave in twenty years but I'd gauge this on the sexier side of things, with harrowing tones. The first song was the best. This is their demo from March, and it looks like they released a couple EPs later in the year. So, this has retroactive promise I guess? (JR) (3-song cassette, lyrics not included, portrayalofguilt.com)

TIPPY – *Self Titled + Public Displays Of Affection* – Two full length recordings crammed onto one cassette (just like the '80s!). Indie / pop that lazily meanders between dreamy and dreary, TIPPY sound like they dropped right off of the lower end of the FM dial (where the quirky college radio stations are found, duh) around 3 AM sometime in 1992. I'll take the mellow keyboard heavy *Public Displays Of Affection* over the sad boy pop on the self-titled side, though moments like "Pipedream" are like a stripped down TEENAGE FANCLUB in a pretty good way. (WN) (12-song cassette, lyrics not included, rareplant.bandcamp.com)

V/A – *Club Hits Vol.: I Am A Peace Of Shit* – No words, just weird. Synth punk and bedroom drum machine dance party freak shows collide for an undeniably awesome catastrophe. Like the SPITS mixed with ON ON ON, but it's a compilation (come on, punk, you read this rag, so you know what I'm talking about here), but on ketamine. So much shit I've never heard of: RISO CLUB, COCTEAU LATEX, PURPURSPYTT, MOSQUITO...and then a party mix of three-year-old commercial dance / pop hits on the flip. If you were wondering where to find the fine line between genius and garbage, it's somewhere between PRINCESS NOKIA and MITTWACH WAH WAH. (WN) (29-song cassette, lyrics not included, clubhits.bandcamp.com)

VOICE TO THE USELESS – *Noise Without Instrument//Chaos Non Instrumenta* – Multi tracked vocal-only noise punk. Like JUD JUD doing GISM. (WN) (1-song CD-R, lyrics included, darkwaterrecords.bandcamp.com)

WAR NOW – *8-track Demo* – Blown out D-beat infused hardcore from St. Petersburg. Despite being from Russia, they've got a very DISCHARGE / DISORDER by way of Japan sound. The vocals are burly and sound as though sung through hands cupped around the mic, and the drums are boomy and fuzzy until the guitars come in and obliterate the rhythm section. I don't know how well-studied in the genre these guys are but I'm finding this take slightly more fresh than similar sounding stuff I hear these days. ANTISECT and BATHORY covers for a little more context. (MA) (10-song cassette, lyrics not included, reforestationrecords.bandcamp.com)

WET SPECIMEN – Exciting first tape from this NYC garage punk band! Only three minutes, so I really hope to hear more from them soon. The tunes are great, with driving drums and the while the guitar riffs are nothing new the sound of it is super fresh and in-your-face. The vocals are my favorite part though; lyrics about being talked at by men, struggling with your flaws, and feeling directionless. The last song is about feeling uncool and nervous around people and not knowing the right bands, and I totally relate to that. Is the punk experience for most of us just doubting if you're punk enough, except for the certain kinds of people who are validated? Maybe this magazine is partly to blame, hmm...evaluate who you celebrate. (HK) (4-song cassette, lyrics included, wetspecimen.bandcamp.com)

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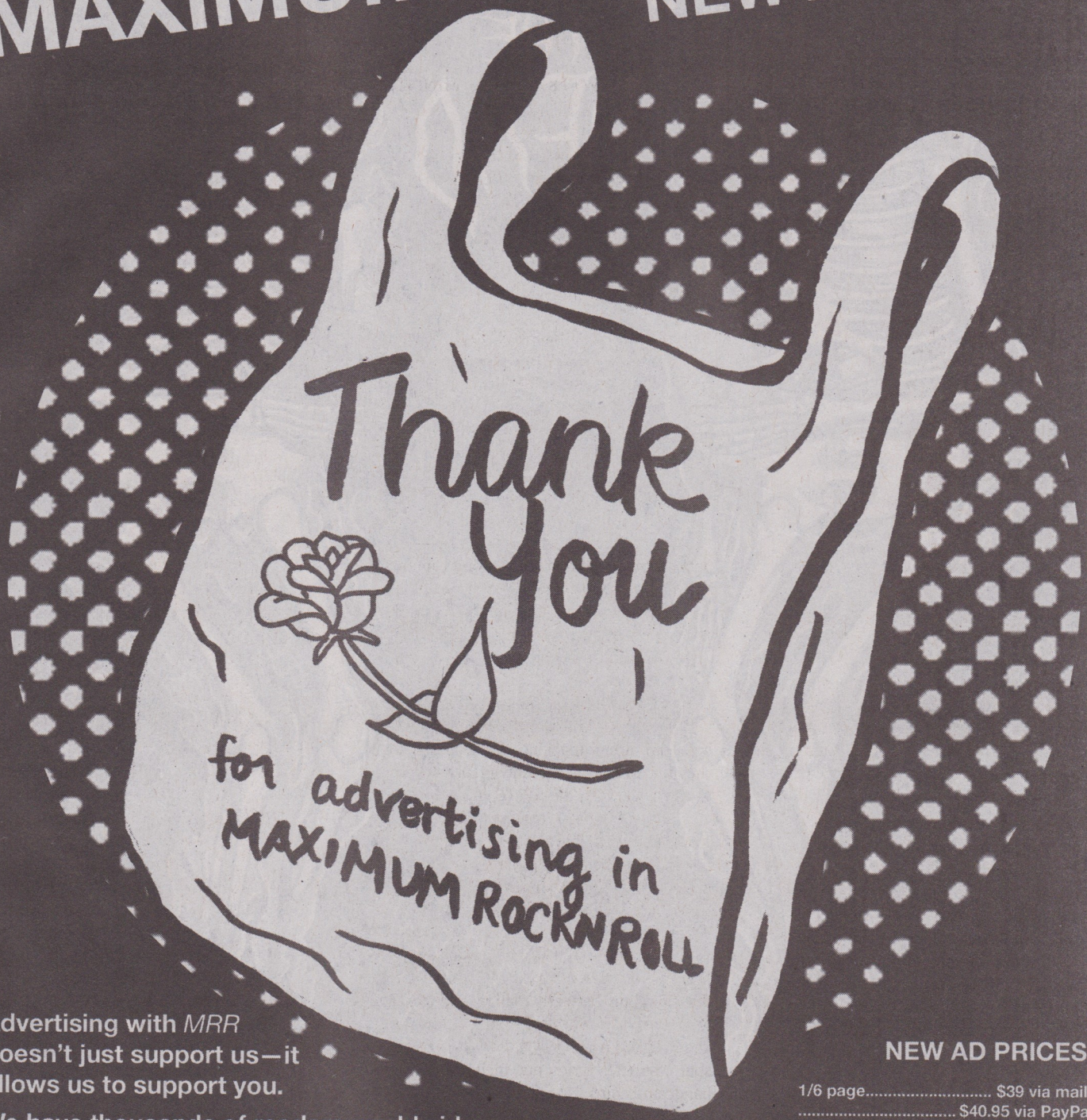

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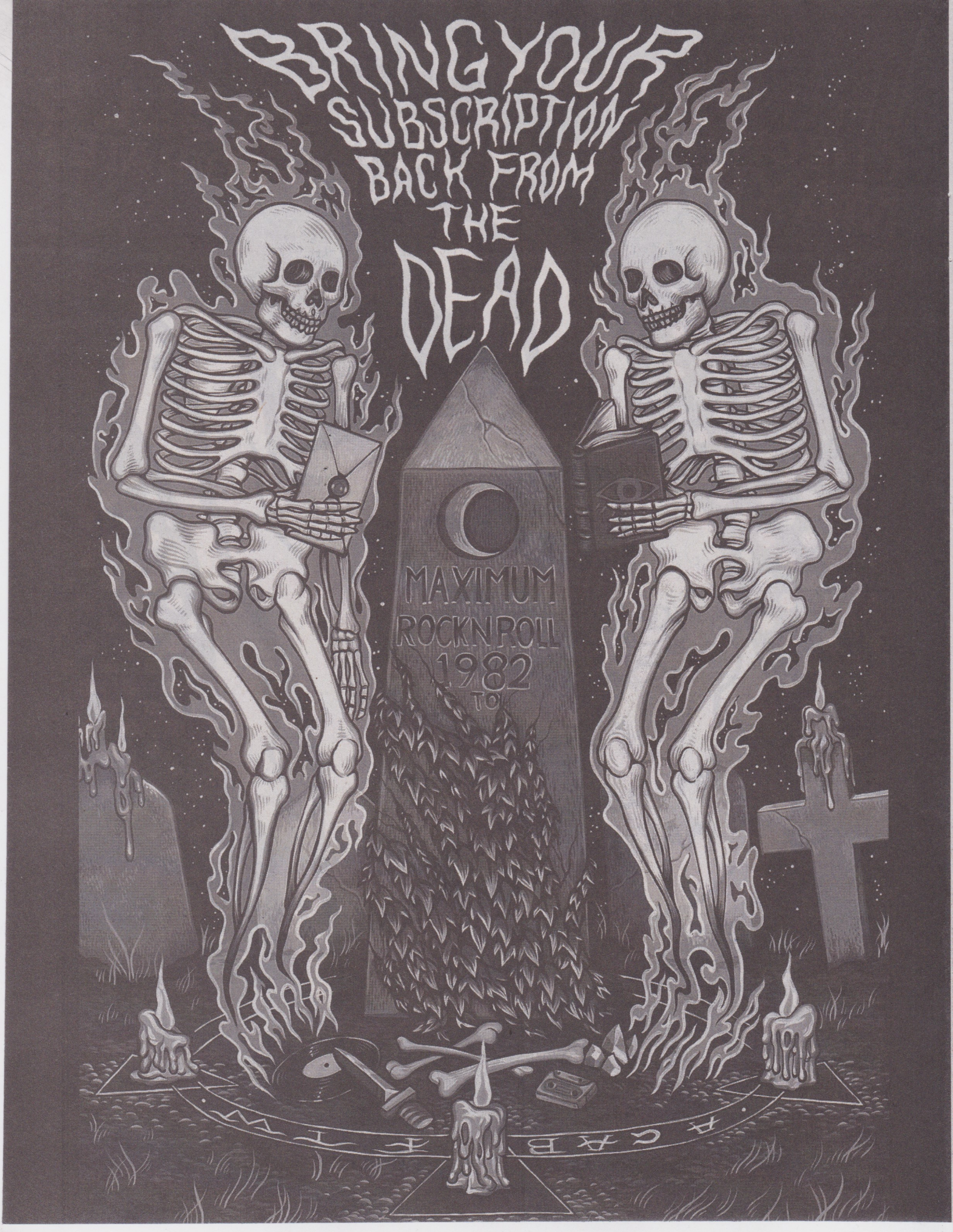
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(MF) Miranda Fisher
(NR) Nimmy Ramona
(RH) Ryan Hertel
(YD) Evie Deller

BOYMOUTH
8 pgs
This is a queer hardcore song in mini-zine form. Each page is another line of fun, loud screaming lyrics as a comic. I want more of this, and I do not know where to find it. The hunt for more of this awesomeness commences now! (RH)

DEEP FRIED ZINE MPLS #15
$1 / 16 pgs
I really like this dumb little fast food / punk zine out of Minneapolis, even though I don't eat that much fast food. It's pretty funny, but it also includes some stuff that might actually useful, like two contributors' favorite vegetarian meals from their recent tour of Scotland. My favorite part of this issue, though, was a weekly menu from the San Quentin State Prison, sent in by regular *MRR* correspondent Wayne. (Hi Wayne!) Fascinating stuff. I wish the cover weren't accidentally stapled on upside down, though! (MF)
Deep Fried Zine MPLS / 2901 Yosemite Avenue S / St. Louis Park / MN 55416 / videophobia222@hotmail.com

FEBRUARY BLISSERTATION
18 pgs
Some kind of undefinable poetry assemblage. I received a copy of this zine from its mysterious longhaired author in the middle of the night, the only other passenger on a steamy MUNI bus leaving fogged out Hunter's Point. They slipped me the zine in the eucalyptus-scented dark and pointed me in the direction of the all-night transbay bus, promptly disappearing to another realm. My copy has a copied-over leaf stuck with toner to the paper and it has changed color over time. Truly ephemeral, this a zine to make you believe that despite the relentless attack, San Francisco's magic is not dead. Riding public transit with a monk, crying tears of fruit and eating them, talking to your ancestors, answering your security questions, a spiral secretly unfolding behind the bookstore cash register, unraveling language, observing all. And it looks good, too-stick-on helvetica, fuzzed out inkwash and gradient toner noise. (AK)
akhorse7@yahoo.com

HYPNOSPIRAL COMICS #9
Free or $2 ppd / 10 pgs
This is a collection of comics from a wide swath of topics (history, politics, working out, kitties, etc.). The zinester is excellent at drawing. The jokes can be hit or miss, but the drawing is great throughout. This is a quick, fun read that can also mostly be found online. The world needs more cartoonists! (RH)
PO Box 54681, Philadelphia, PA 19148 / hypnospiralcomic.com / mjacobalvarez@gmail.com

IN THE CLOSET #1
$1 / 24 pgs
Cute if inconsequential comic about two skeletons hanging out...in a closet? (I'm honestly unsure if they're actually supposed to be in the closet or not.) Each comic is three or four panels, and some are legitimately funny; I liked one skeleton dressing up as "myself" for Halloween...by putting on a skeleton costume. I didn't love every strip, but fun overall! (MF)

KNOW-IT-ALL ASSHOLE JERK
$5 / 56 pgs
Collection of writings on the less than usual first published on Adel's website. I reviewed their collection on musical esoterica a few months ago and this is of the same ilk—one pagers about topics of interest. Instead of records, bands and genres—this time the focus is hoaxes, strange beliefs, religion and art / literary weirdness. You might be familiar with some of these, but I can't imagine the jaded reader who is already in the know about all of these. The reprint of the toilet training your cat pamphlet by Charles Mingus was a pleasant surprise for me. (JA)
adelsouto.com

PIXEL JIZZ #1-2
50 pgs / 62 pgs
Pixel Jizz is awesome. Not only is it a wonderful collection of queer nerd / geek content, but it's perfectly copied, easy to read, and just looks nice. This is a home run for queer nerds who want a to see more of themselves and people like them. There are coloring pages (Zangief topping Ryu), comics, games (queer gaming crosswords, a video game board game), and copious interviews (*Transcat* writer / artist Knave Murdock, East Bay Gaymers & Geeks founder Jonathan Capricola, and many more!). A big chunk of issue two is a *Transcat* comic in which our hero explains the Star Wars prequel she would have written. It's epic. If you have even a passing interest in the worlds of gaming, anime, comic books, or just really good zines, seek this one out as quickly as you can. (RH)
pixeljizz510@gmail.com

RIPPED OFF RAZORS #9
$3 / 6 pgs
Since February, Chloe of Weaverville, NC, has produced this charming zine, of which there are nine issues to date. Each is six pages; has collage-style cover art; opens with "Carbon Copy," a stream-of-consciousness feature; contain birthday commemorations of cultural icons (e.g. Frida Kahlo, Vivienne Westwood); and includes original comics. The back page has a figure that's part of an ongoing

"Subculture Cut-Out Series" and dressed in emo, riot grrrl, or other styles. *Ripped Off Razors* is clearly a creative outlet for Chloe, and issue nine offers more of the same art-school goodness. With tributes to artist Alberto Giacometti and silent-era film star Lillian Gish, plus original art and essays, *Ripped Off Razors* #9 is a sharp slice of small-town DIY. (GM)
greendolphinsaysoink@gmail.com

STRANGE NOTES BY RICHIE DAGGER: NO GOD
16 pgs
Full sized artzine tribute to the fountain of inspiration born Jan Paul Beahm. Some collages, hand scrawled Crash-isms and the main selling point—a handful of drawings building on the classic Pushead and Shawn Kerri originals with a really nice line / style (the maker appears to be a prolific and talented tattoo artist). Comes with a riso print handbill and a nice Germs armband. Looks great, loads of dark fun and I assume the Roz Williams issue is good too. (JA)
jameskendrickthomas@icloud.com

TO GIRL THE GIRL — NEW REVOLTING POEMS
18 pgs
Zine of body-horror fuck-society inner-world poems from a brilliant "fat faggot" who is "mostly a dyke," pushing the envelope of a small New England city, one named for the protective power of a god who has forsaken us. For those prone to cysts and despair with interest in shit, egg salad, Benadryl. Set in Times New Toman, re-appropriated Providence postcard pop art, ink drawing, whiteout and blood, this is a queer zine that is *not cute*. Poems that read like filthy hymns and gleeful nursery rhymes to be sung by a choir of angels and criminals at the funeral of America. (AK)
noraakaplan@gmail.com

TRUST #192
3.00 € / 68 pgs
Columns, reviews, and interviews with Dropdead, Arterials, Muro, TLR, and the Boss Tunage label. It's all in German, so my monolingual thick head can't tell you if great / new insights are made but I will say the layout (minus the ads) looks really good following the "classic Swiss model" I guess (I'm not design fluent either I just know it looks clean and interesting). (JA)
Dolf Hermannstädter Postfach 11 07 62 28087 Bremen / trust-zine.de

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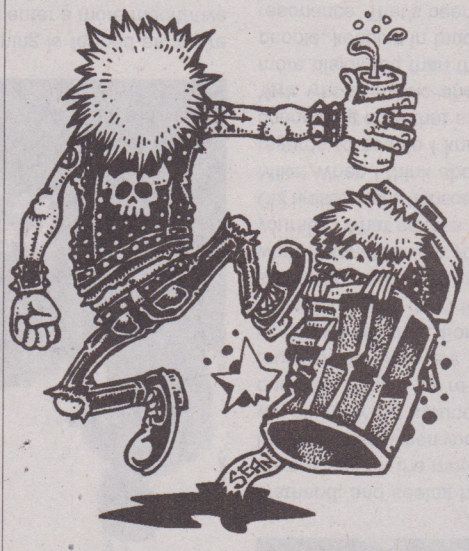

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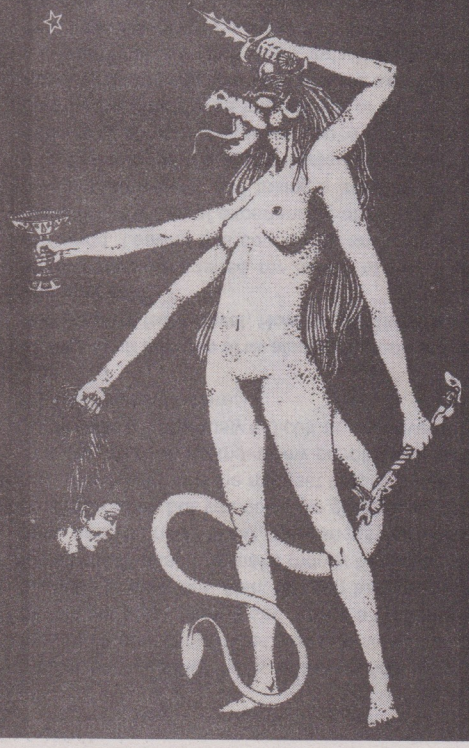

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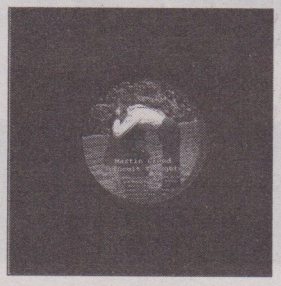

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cynical and negative here, to bitch about your horrible day, bitch about this, bitch about that. That's one version of the cartoon New York. I see people get stuck here in sad places all the time, and I do too, but it's not because of cynicism. Also, you can turn over a new leaf here in one day. It's so much easier to make money here than anywhere else. If you're in debt, and you need $500, you can just go make $500. It might be really uncomfortable, but you could go get that money relatively quickly. If you have the energy and the mindset to just go there, you can start a new life in a day. You can go meet new people and be in a whole different world in one day. It's obviously difficult to conceive of that mentally, but you can do it. It's possible here.

MRR: I think all three of us also appreciate leaving New York and learning and growing from travel. How do you think traveling has influenced you and your art?

Mike: It has broadened my sense of vision and my understanding of the world. Leaving this country for an extended period of time has been powerful, in terms of experiencing other ways of life and reflecting on the way I operate here, and taking a step back from being so absorbed by it. It has allowed me to see myself from a more distant perspective. It's difficult to achieve that when you're stuck in your daily routines. I can't emphasize enough the importance of getting a sense of the size of the world, and realizing how what you are experiencing at a certain place and a certain time is such a small, individual glimpse into all that is going on. That idea just blows my mind over and over.

Frances: And back to our conversation about New York, I think the kind of existence that appeals to us here has so much to do with having this really flexible mindset—the idea that things can change overnight, that things can always be new. It's easy to fall into routines, because it's easy to cling to the familiar, but I think that something we aspire to is to live more open and organic lives full of newness and transformation. And that is possible here, but I think because it is such a mindset thing, traveling can help spark that nomadic lifestyle.

I'd say that I try to live a nomadic lifestyle here in New York. I really want things to feel different everyday; I want to feel open to newness. There's something about traveling that simulates that, because you don't have an agenda, and you're just open to following a different kind of thread—

like a thread of synchronicities—where the meaning is formed as you're going. When the backdrop is zooming by you, you enter a more meditative mindset, and you can kind of focus on yourself more. When you're on tour, for instance, you're so in touch with yourself, because all you have is yourself, and you're observing your thoughts and the feelings that arise from those thoughts. And there's the forward motion: you have to keep going, so you have to figure out a way, and you don't have anything to rely on. I find that I'm more quietly in touch with myself when I get back from traveling.

Mike: I almost equate traveling to acquiring new lenses through which you can view your life, through experiencing different lifestyles and cultures

firsthand, and seeing how other people live. I think the more lenses you have acquired, the more holistic your relationship with living can become.

Frances: Also, when you stay in the same place where you grew up—since we all grew up around here—there's the whole nature versus nurture question. Where we're from is such a huge part of who we are, but so much of our lives are circumstantial, based on the people we met, the worlds we fell into. Sometimes I feel a tension with the scenes that I've fallen into, like I don't feel like they're a perfect reflection of me. So, going somewhere else that has nothing to do with where you're from, and seeing what resonates with you, is a great way of finding out the nature part of yourself. What echoes so specifically to you is so clear.

Our artistic scene transcends place. It's made up of people in all different places.

Mike: When I think about my strongest, most personal connections, with regards to people I know who are making art and music, I think of it as connecting dots that are all over the place. I have a lot of friends in New York whose music and art I love and respect, but as a whole it feels more disjointed than that. A lot of that has come from traveling, meeting people, keeping in touch, sharing and exchanging where there's a mutual resonance. That's been one of the greatest rewards from all of the energy and effort that I have put into music.

giantpeachsongs.bandcamp.com

MRR: I've been thinking about how place, our physical environment, influences artistic expression. What have you noticed about how where you put yourself affects what comes out?

Mike: It's hard for me to sit in my bedroom and write. It's easier when I'm sitting by a waterfront at night, or when I'm on an airplane or train, or when I'm traveling to a new place and have an open schedule. I find inspiration in moving, traveling, and being stimulated by new surroundings.

Frances: I really agree. To really nail something down, I have to be in my room with an instrument and something to record with. But when it's still forming—like what I was talking about with the brick, and this lyric and this melody feeling concrete—I've started to write stuff while walking around the city, just singing and figuring it out in my head. And that's really cool because you're always commuting in New York.

Maybe one day I will want to go more into that, but for the most part, I just want to chill and experience different stuff, and New York is somewhere you can do that. I think about how I've been holding this place open for music—like staying in day jobs, not going to grad school, not going into any other career—as if it's any day now that I'm going to devote everything to music and make it into a career. But I've been thinking more and more that it's ok for me to follow other interests too, and that doesn't necessarily mean I'm giving up on music. If I'm honest with myself, I should study psychology and do more with that. I just know that my natural interests are so ready to leap into that. But I have this attachment to "being an artist" and living this "artist's life." And I wonder how much of it is following my natural interests, and how much of it is not.

Mike: Yeah, New York is a city where you really have to work to live. The

MRR: I wanted to talk about what it's been like for you to live in New York. Your songs describe feelings of being trapped, overwhelmed, stuck, being faced with uncertainty and failure, but there's a sense of constant movement too—of still going on. These things aren't particular to New York, but they feel acute here.

Frances: I think something that is particular to New York is this feeling of almost not being able to go on. Life can get you down so hard here. In New York, it's clear that there's an industry, and people come here with ambitions, so there is some kind of motivation propelling people to be here and do anything here. It's weird trying to exist outside of those hierarchies and that path of success. It's not easy to do, because it's always there. And so I think failure can feel so much worse here, and become such a thing that it might not be in places where there isn't as much pressure. You're constantly needing to justify going forward, needing to justify doing all this stuff, making this music. Everyone needs to keep busy, and you want to always be "doing things." And that's not really how I roll. I can do nothing for long periods of time, and I don't think it really gets me down that much, except for that pressure.

Mike: Yeah, New York felt like a natural place to go, in terms of it being a place where so much art and music is constantly happening. There are people we know here, and there are opportunities to do new things and meet new people. But when you're traveling and going on tour, you see different cities and lifestyles. It's interesting to compare how other people who are playing in bands are able to survive. It's common to work a service job two to three days a week and have that be enough to pay your rent and to pay for a practice space, and give you lots of free time to work on your personal creative projects.

Frances: But also, we live in New York because we want to do a lot of different things. I don't need to only make music or only produce art. majority of the people I know here in the punk scene have to work so much to pay rent. The stress level here is very high, comparatively, and these things can make you feel down on the city.

Frances: And they can make you conceive of a concept like "failure." I mean, you go through ups and downs in life, and you go through periods where things are coalescing on a much more unconscious level, when you're going through changes and shifts. Sometimes there is so little appreciation for those periods that you end up just slapping a label like "failure" on them.

Mike: It's a perspective issue. It's one way of looking at it. Another way is figuring out how to make it work if you want to be here, which we all clearly do. New York can be a beautiful, freeing place, unlike anywhere else that I've ever been. I think it has its moments when you'll get hit with waves reminding you why it's so great to be here—the history, all the people you're surrounded by, and all the energy you're surrounded by. That's the kind of positive energy of the city that I try to harness, and maybe what influences me to continue trying to do art, even though it's sometimes a struggle.

Frances: Art as a career is what tells you that you always have to be making art because it's your job. I've always been of the camp that believes that art comes out because it has to. To me, when something feels "inspired," it came out because it had to. There's nothing wrong with having a practice and making music whenever you sit down, but from my perspective, there's a difference in how it sounds. They're both valuable, but who says you have to be doing it all the time? If there's no reason, no impetus, to me, it almost doesn't make sense.

You know, you have to gather up experiences to make them come out. New York is like a big psychedelic trip: you can spiral down a really bad trip, which is really easy here, because it can be stylistically cool to be

people. We would make a compilation, and I would have one song in it, but I wasn't making full albums of my own music quite yet. I think my approach was to play and record a lot of music at my house, by myself, not for anyone else, quietly, in my bedroom. In high school, I put out a few tapes and CDs of my music, but I would play and record it all at my house, and perfect it to a point where I wanted to make all the artwork, finish the product, and then share it. I was more drawn to the idea of the album than the song. Maybe it had a lot to do with that era, when records and CDs were made with a lot of care, often handmade, in limited edition, and the artwork would be different on each one. I really loved that aspect of music—feeling like you could get an object from a band that was a document of their work, not just this and not necessarily a mass-produced thing.

MRR: When did the two of you first hear each other's music?

Frances: I remember the first show I played in college. This is when I was younger, and I didn't have any fear. I didn't overthink things. Fortune favors the brave: you go for opportunities, and then it works out so fortuitously. I remember, we were at our radio show—me, you [Kelly], and our friend Ariel—and Ariel was Instant Messaging with our friend Sam who was putting on a house show, and I remember just being like, "Hey, you should ask him if I can play." So she messaged Sam, and he was like, "Yeah, definitely." And so it was done. I remember I practiced a bunch for that—kicked my roommate out of my room — felt fine, and then played it. That was that house show with our friend Carsten, who was playing as Photosynthesis, and Karl Blau. And Wildebeest.

Mike: Sam and I booked that show together.

Frances: I was so proud, because Karl Blau also used a loop pedal. He came and talked to me afterwards about how he liked my use of the loop pedal, and then during his set he improvised a song about how inspired he was by my use of the loop pedal.

Mike: I have some vivid memories of that show. I remember seeing you *[Frances]* from the crowd. I remember listening to you, and seeing you play, and thinking that it was really, really good. We had just gotten to college then, and it was a pretty surreal experience standing outside of that house with you and all these people I knew before college, like Matt and my brother and Evan [all of Wildebeest]. And Karl Blau was there. What a cool thing to have happen so quickly. I think I was riding on some carryover high school momentum, thinking I gotta keep booking shows, gotta bring a music scene from my home to my college and see if it works. So yeah, the first time I saw Frances play was definitely at that house show. In December 2007, at 148 College Avenue, in Poughkeepsie, New York.

Frances: The first time I remember really hearing Mike's music—I remember I tripped on acid for the first time, and Mike and I got together later in the day and recorded this whole improvised album on my loop pedal, with all these built-in drum machine beats. It was like cartoony, acid-sounding, psychedelic stuff. We actually have a tape of that. It's called Pancakes on Acid. That was the first time that I really heard Mike's style, which is really distinct, and was extremely distinct back in the day. Really rhythmic, really percussive. I remember being struck by how incredibly original it felt and sounded to me. Just like, an electric kind of energy.

MRR: What was it like collaborating at first?

Frances: Even with Pancakes on Acid, if you listen to it, you can hear the style of the songs kind of switch off. Because Mike has a really distinct style, and I guess so do I. So what I think would happen is that one of us would take the lead, and then the other would just be supportive, and I think that's how our collaboration style has always been. When we both started really playing, we were arranging songs that we had already written for each of our individual projects in full-band style.

Mike: Yes, that's well said. Whoever's song it was would take the lead and essentially show up to practice with the entire song finished, with room for things to change, but the structure is there, the idea is there. I think that foundational mindset has been continuous throughout our collaboration.

Frances: If there was more flexibility, it was probably in response to other people in the band. I mean, bands are also about collaboration. But somehow, between me and Mike, there was this unspoken thing where we didn't want to impose on each other's vision. We just wanted it to be pure, trust the person's vision, and trust that it was what it was. It wasn't a conscious ideal that we had. It was natural.

MRR: How have you approached making records? My impression is that you don't set out to make one from scratch, but you kind of amass material in an open-ended way and then decide to synthesize things into an album.

Frances: I think the reason that albums exist is because people tend to have waves of creative inspiration. Songs that you write during a certain period tend to be cohesive in a way because they're all of that time. So our albums have felt varying levels of cohesiveness because they were amassed from longer periods and then squished into an album.

Mike: I totally agree. That's definitely what happened with this last record. We went through an intense period of writing super creatively and differently from before, and we found ourselves with a group of people who were as dedicated to it as Frances and I were. We just really enjoyed writing and playing and practicing together, like as often and for as long as we possibly could at the time.

Frances: For this last record, most of the songs were skeletons that I brought in. With the earlier records, I felt like Mike was constantly—from my perspective—flowing with inspiration. With Tarantula, he just had all these songs that he kept writing, and I remember struggling to keep up. I felt like I needed to hold up my half, because that was the conception of the band. But I was dry for so long, up until I wrote songs for this album. This was the biggest batch of songs that I'd ever written, and it was the most inspired that I had felt for a really long time. I think that is one reason why this record sounds cohesive. We also arranged this one together a lot. There was a lot of dogged, detail-oriented collaboration.

Mike: This record presents our most challenging work ever—challenging to us as a band, with regards to the writing process, but also to the listener in certain ways. Some of the songs are long, with a lot of different parts and things going on—just endless intricacies from start to finish. It can be tiresome for some. But I'm proud that it is a thing that we made. I think it's an interesting documentation of a certain era of our band, our relationships, and a period of intense collaboration.

MRR: When you're writing lyrics, how do you know what material from your personal lives you want to put into your music? How do you know what feels ready to share?

Frances: I obscure things. These very private thoughts are literally the reasons that I'm writing these songs. I need to get these thoughts and feelings out, but I also need some privacy from all the people I know who are making this music with me and who are watching the shows.

Mike: I approach my writing with a level of vagueness. That's just the way I write. It often comes out in verse form, like more poetic journal entries. Sometimes I'll write a phrase, then skip a few lines, write another phrase, skip a few lines, write a phrase, and then I'll go back and kind of fill in the blanks, and it will take on a form that makes sense to me. To someone else, it might seem really abstract, but to me, the raw emotion is there.

I also approach my writing from a grander perspective. The initial push to write can come from a personal experience, but I don't sit down and document it in a detailed way. I'll touch on my own personal experience, but then immediately zoom out and see myself in this big-world perspective, and see these greater waves of emotion that are hidden.

Frances: Same, actually. The core of an experience to me is not the physical details, like, "We walked to the water and sat there." It's what is psychologically or emotionally going on. I think because of that, my lyrics turn out to be almost general sounding, but they are specific thoughts. That's what has been coming out most recently. It's become very internal, not very based in physical reality.

I also don't really write my lyrics first. What happens is that they arise in tandem with music. One lyric set to a certain melody will feel really right, and I'll be like, "That's concrete, I know it." So where the music and the lyrics meet, there will be something that feels really solid, and then the whole song will build out from that one brick. Each time a brick like that happens, I'll feel certain about that, and everything else will form around it. It's a spacey process.

MRR: Can you talk about the role music played in your lives when you were younger?

Mike: I wasn't really interested in playing music when I was a kid. I had some cassettes that I would listen to in the car, mainly Beastie Boys, Primus, White Zombie, and Jamiroquai. Those were the four bands I liked—this was in middle school. There was a record store downtown that we would go to, but I didn't really get into music in a more serious way until high school. There was a pretty thriving music scene on Long Island at the time, in many of the towns surrounding Northport, which is where I grew up. Lots of the older kids in high school played music and booked house shows, and that definitely influenced me and people my age.

MRR: When did you start playing music?

Mike: Soon after I started going to shows. Going to house shows—super DIY basement shows with punk bands, folk bands, rock bands, hardcore bands, but all very raw, intimate, personal, emotional performances—had a big influence on my relationship to music. It changed the way I thought about it. I didn't think about it as this thing you just listened to and enjoyed anymore; it became something that really affected me, something that I really felt personally. That influenced me to pick up a guitar and try to express myself through that medium, because it seemed really powerful. And everyone at these house shows was very accepting. No one made you feel weird for being the one younger kid there who didn't drink or party—none of that mattered. There was no pressure in this setting. It was all about mutual support and loving each other, which was really powerful.

I also owe a lot to my older brother, who introduced me to people in the music scene and acted as a natural kind of avenue through which I could meet people and hear and see bands. That was an extra level of comfort.

Frances: The thing that really got me into music as a kid was singing. I remember the first album that my mom ever got me was Like a Prayer by Madonna. I listened to a lot of female ballad kind of things. I listened to Mariah, I listened to Celine Dion, and I listened to Madonna—like, a lot. I think as a kid, I always wanted to express myself creatively, but I went through phases of experimenting with how to do it. Initially, I was really into drawing. I drew a lot. Then, in fourth grade, we had this mandatory play. It was weird if you decided to opt out, it was more normal to just suck it up and do it. So I joined that play, and I was a shy kid, but I realized that performing felt really natural to me. And it was a musical, and I really liked singing. So I started getting really into doing musicals and discovering musicals that I liked. I had really specific taste—I didn't like more classic sounding musicals; I was into more contemporary sounding stuff.

When I hit high school, I was getting kind of tired of the musical theater scene. It just didn't feel like it was for me anymore. But there was this shift in high school, when I started becoming more social in a larger group, whereas before I was more of a loner. I remember thinking, "Oh! I get how to make friends, how to commune with a larger social group: you have to get familiar with some media to connect with people about." Which sounds like a robot, but literally, I thought I just needed to find some shared context. So I started discovering movies I liked and music I liked. LastFM was really big at the time, so I was checking out people's LastFMs. I used Limewire like crazy.

Mike: Sharing music through the internet was a big part of my experience with music at that age as well. I would use GetFile. Or Soulseek. I was constantly browsing other people's libraries of music and sharing mine.

Frances: At that point my music taste was really broad. I had different friends who were introducing me to a lot of different stuff. There was just a huge intake. I remember educating myself on basic levels. My parents are immigrants, and they didn't really show me any classic American canon music at all, besides my mom randomly liking a couple John Lennon and Neil Young songs. So I went through a huge obsession with the Beatles. There was so much. Music played a lot of roles for me then, but eventually it became almost like a soundtrack thing. I was so intensely emotional in high school. I was going through a lot of stuff—family stuff, heartbreaks, whatever. There are so many memories I have of going on walks by myself and listening to these really specific songs, and just crying. The cinematicness helped me really feel the full extent of my feelings.

MRR: When did you start making your own music?

Frances: In middle school I was already writing songs on the piano and on an acoustic guitar. In high school, I got an electric guitar, and I started recording and looping stuff on GarageBand. It felt natural that way. It took a long time for me to feel confident playing guitar, because it was really all in the service of writing songs. It was all about recording songs and making them really complex—doing vocals and guitar, doing multiple tracks. For a long time, I'm sure I couldn't even play those songs live.

MRR: How did you start sharing your music?

Frances: I would record a song, finish it, and the first thing I would do was send it to a bunch of friends. We would play it in the car. I didn't have any shame at the time about listening to my own music. I would record something and listen to it on repeat afterwards. That was the reward.

Mike: I didn't start recording music right away. I got more involved in just being part of the scene, booking shows, or collaborating with other

PHOTOS BY MIKE NAIDEAU, KATE SHEELY, RYAN EILBECK
DESIGN BY NIRZAR

INTERVIEW BY KELLY CHAN

The unflinching sincerity of songwriters Frances Chang and Mike Naideau pushes to the surface in ten tracks, some churning with lush, dissonant textures evocative of post-rock, others springing forth with syncopated percussion and racing guitars, all of them gathering lyric and melody to paint flashes of worlds that are natural, urban, and interior.

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This year, New York-based Giant Peach released its second full-length album, But You Made Me Such A Beautiful Thing. The album begs to be listened to in full, with songs that make room for the searching honesty of the bedroom demo as well as the catalytic energy of the full-band performance. Chang and Naideau recently sat down with a friend to talk about music, about growing up in the suburbs, living in New York City, traveling, and staying open to change.

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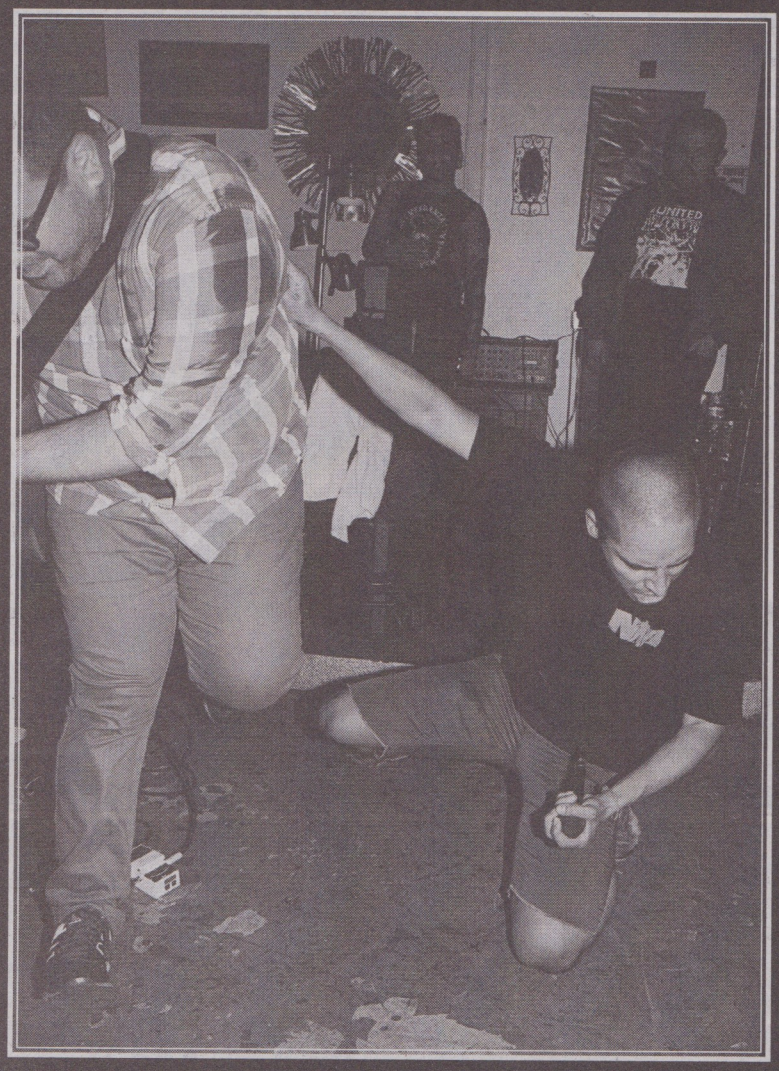
GIANT peach

to us personally and collectively. Songs about gentrification, displacement, mental health, legacies of generational traumas caused by colonialism, racism, poverty, and incarceration. The cover art is the work of a very talented artist from Oaxaca based out of Riverside, California named Pável Acevedo who also did our first 12". He's got his own style, and we really like it. Band albums are interesting projects because they involve the wishes and aspirations of so many people with their own ideas of what it ought to be. We think *Terrenos* is no different in that regard in that it is the end product of five different people coming together to make music and express ideas that we care about. Sometimes it's fragmented, and sometimes it's more of a unified vision. We hope that listeners hear something that speaks to them, and that's satisfying enough to us.

Fern: I think the most important thing in this band is the action behind the creation and vice versa. It's inspired by lived experience. Another amazing element was how we all coincided and met each other and the process that led to this. Our friend Marco cites the "Law of Attraction!" *[laughter]* I mean, our dream was to find each other, to a certain degree! For one, it seems hard to find people who like this DC style, let alone people who have the same sensibilities, with similar life experiences. So that all went into the songwriting process. Ray calling "Embers" an Insted style song, Mark citing Inside Out, me referring to Rain, Mike channeling Fugazi, and so on. Then we'd talk about experiences we've had, whether these were from growing up, our family histories, our daily work, our communities, etc. We'd chat about myriad topics, from multiple perspectives, as different members are involved in different community and/or academic projects and endeavors. So even before the lead-up to *Terrenos*, our experiences / knowledge shaped the lyrics, and our love for this specific manifestation of hardcore punk shaped the music. All of this going on within the broader political context. I mean, I recall all of us texting in our group chat during the presidential debate.

MRR: What's next for the band? It seems like y'all are determined to stay a band in spite of geographical difficulties. What does that mean for the future of the band? Are you still able to write songs, record, play live?

Mike: We have every intention of keeping Marrón alive and playing shows in the coming year. Our music is more accessible online now thanks to our friend Marco from Advanced Perspective, who helped put our music on some streaming sites. We've been talking about doing another record. Ray and Julio remain quite active in their communities with respect to playing music and putting on shows. They are part of a collective called C47 who put on shows for local and touring bands out in the High Desert. They have a new project (A | WAY) and have recently decided to start documenting the growth of their local scene through a 7" comp that is in the works.



MRR: Anything I missed?

Fern: My only thing is that people remember of what's at stake. My parents don't wanna go back to their home state because there are people that are hung on trees and overpasses, heads that are chopped off because of cartel violence that's supported by the US. It's like our parents can't even go back to where they were born because of this violence and here in the inner cities and what's going on with policing. All this messed up stuff is not some abstract thing you'd get from a Discharge record or something, but this is very real thing that's happening before us. For us to do this as just entertainment...I mean, I love buying records, it's fun, I love moshing and dancing, but then I remind myself there's gotta be a little something more. Also it's about being gentle with people. I love a lot of bands that are badass hardcore, but it's be not being like "you're badass but you don't sing about that." I mean, I use to be like that...

Mark: ...but you got your own voice and bands to do that. If no one else is doing it, you gotta do it.

Releases:
Demo
s/t 12" on Take it Back records
Terrenos LP on Verdugo Discos

marron.bandcamp.com

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way, taking what the band wants to talk about as a collective, and then we just work them out through the chorus and figure it out. I mean at the end of the day it's still a punk song, a hardcore song. "Capital," it's kind of has a Gray Matter feel to it, very DC very anthemic. So it's a mix about trying to deliver a powerful message that we care about and making it sound good with the music.

Fern: We joke around a lot. I mean, we're not like super serious. I mean, we talk about those things in the lyrics, but at the same time I think it's important to be conscious. Something about hardcore when it becomes politicized, it becomes this thing that's very strict, and the standard becomes very high, right? But we're imperfect, it's hard, it's a process. It's a process to try and be a better person. You can be listening to the best records, you're eating a certain way and acting a certain way, but it's still hard to do. We live in these different worlds and have different realities and those things seep into us and they hurt us or they stress us out physically, emotionally, and mentally. The other day, we were joking and having a lot of fun in the van, but at the same time we take it back and talk about serious things in our own lives then that seep into the lyrics and what we wanna talk about.

Julio: That's one of the things I like about our band is that I feel these are my brothers. We all come from Mexican families, and that's one thing that kinda bonds us together and helps us write in a very intimate way.

Mike: That reminds me of the first questioned you asked, which is a good question but it's also the question for *MRR*: "How did you guys start?" Another thing that got us going initially was that there are so many bands that we love, and we try and model ourselves after a certain sound, a lot of bands do that. One of our things was like, "What if this band played like this but spoke about ghettos and barrios?" or Ray would be like, "I love that music, but I wish they talk about having a shitty ass wage job and having all these family responsibilities." So it's kind of meshing that all the bands do it, some bands do it some better than others. I know a lot the bands that you were in would also do it. I think that was a spark for us is that, like Julio was saying, we all come from Mexican immigrant families, Mexican-American families, so for us it was like, we love Revolution Summer stuff, but I also wish we could also talk about other stuff.

Raymon: That whole Revolution Summer era we love. We connect to it musically. But there's that connection that we need past music. That's why me and Mike always wanted to do a band like that, that style I guess, but connect with other young Brown folk...

Fern: Hopefully other folks of color.

Mark: Everyone.

Fern: Yeah, everyone. Anyone who is down for this.

MRR: Those have been the most powerful bands to me. The ones you can relate to on both planes. Otherwise it's just some internalized shit, or you're reading lyrics and it's like you're reading a textbook...

Mike: Exactly.

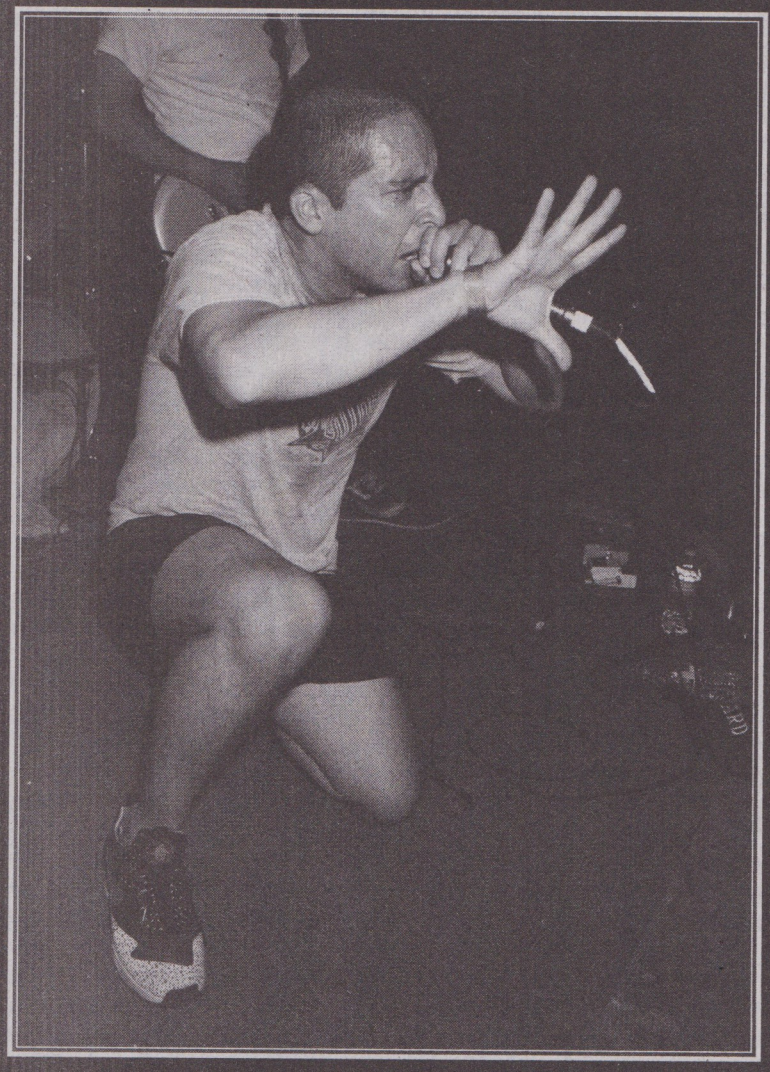
MRR: So it makes it a little harder to relate sometimes. I mean if that's what I'm hearing from you guys?

Mike: Totally, you got it right. It's like, sometimes we're trying to communicate shit that's complicated but in a way that is relatable, so sometimes it's like, "how do you talk about capitalism without doing a typical Profane Existence...?" I mean, we can scream "fuck the pigs!" and things like that, but I guess we're trying to do it in a different way.

MRR: Did your approach to songwriting change in the time leading up to your most recent album, *Terrenos*? It's clear that the band puts so much thought into the meaning of its songs. Is there anything you wanted to do differently, musically or lyrically, with this album?

Mike: We're not sure if our approach to songwriting changed except to say that we kept writing songs non-stop well after our first 12" on Take it Back. Sometimes our songs got pieced together over digital communication (email, voice memos), and other times inside a jam room. We did put a lot of thought into the writing of *Terrenos*, from the music to the lyrics, themes, and art. In some ways, it's an outgrowth of our first 12", in that the music still has that throwback feel of the melodic styles of the later 1980s and early 1990s that we like. For instance, a song like "Take" that has a bit of a DC-style, groovy tempo to it, could have easily been on our first 12" and fit right in with those tracks. But this time we were able to include a little more variety in the album. We have tracks that are much faster—such as "Embers"—and much slower than our usual tempo such as "Trauma." We threw in a few early tracks from our first demo that we wanted to revamp. Lyrically, *Terrenos* encapsulates issues and themes that remain important

more politically confrontational, are the stakes higher now because of the right-wing control of all branches of government? Yes, and although we share in the punk skepticism of not placing any stock in electoral politics, we also see the importance of expressing our resistance against institutions that try to erase us, dispossess us, and keep us poor.



Fern: Hmmm... this is both a complex and urgent question. Outo would call it, "Many Question, Poison Answer." I think Mike hits the nail on the head with his response. My biggest concern with this is the fine line between subculture / culture / art and other methods of expression and how these relate to policies and material conditions of people. If our music is just music, then what's the point? I think we all vary in how we think about this question, but now the bigger question is the element of "performance of politics" versus action and its impact on policy and living conditions and the role we can play in pushing that, if any. This is the facade of subculture in my opinion. It may be painful because we place so much importance on this, but if nothing changes in our daily lives, in our communities, in our families, in our health, in our emotional well being, in our environmental well being, then what was the point of that music?

I mean, we're living in the era where Jordan Peele can win an Oscar for his screenplay in *Get Out*, where Disney-Pixar produces *Coco*, where Marvel releases *Black Panther*, and we have the current political situation. So what does it mean? That's the question. And what will be the ultimate outcome? That's the question for me. Leaving me with the only answer being action that can lead to sustained change. Change we may never even live to see. And action + change is hard as hell.

MRR: It seems like the band has become even more of a long-distance project over the years. What prompted that? Has it made it harder to stay a band?

Mike: It has been hard to stay a band given all the distance between its members. I was living in South Bend for a bit and have since moved to New York City. Most of us still live in Southern California, but Mark is now living in Sacramento, also teaching. Ray and Julio are in the High Desert, Fern is in Oxnard, and all of this makes it much more difficult to play shows and remain active as a band. But we think the distance and difficulty makes everything we do that much more special to us and rewarding. The shows that we play (when we can!) really matter to us, and we still utilize them as critical spaces to dialogue with people beyond just playing our music. We realize that can come off as a bit cliché, but we really believe in DIY punk and hardcore shows still having that energy to be generative spaces leading to more creative action. We intend to keep Marrón active and around to the best of our abilities and hopefully we can find time on the calendar to play some shows and do a small tour.

Fern: The spaces we occupied or occupy as people are essential to our world view and anything else we are involved in, right? I mean, we've all had multiple conversations about this. Southern California occupies an interesting place in US history; however, so does Chicago, a place Mike has written extensively about. Mark writes about San Bernardino, analyzing its own history and development. Mike is originally from South Central L.A., Julio from Compton to Hesperia, Ray from Santa Ana to Victorville, and me up in Oxnard. So in our lyrics, conversations, space and our relation to space is important. So our friend Dan, who wrote up the intro to this interview, highlighted this by mentioning it. Mike wrote a short piece for Dan's fanzine, *Terrarium*, where he relates the foundational impact of Fugazi on him as a youngster, and guess what? Mike describes, in vivid picturesque detail, how the track "Sieve-Fisted Find" was a kind of soundtrack by which he experienced and traversed the complicated, racialized terrain of Los Angeles. This is a great example of what Marrón is.

MRR: When you guys explained that song "Capital" at Gilman, I thought there was a lot of thoughtfulness going on and what those lyrics were about, and I was wondering if you guys come up with that through a collective process and write all the lyrics, or do you guys share them with each other or...?

Mike: Yeah, it's collective. Sometimes Ray will have a subject that he really wants to hash out in a song, Julio will tell us something, so Fern and I will get together and try and work out songs in that

Marrón is: Mark Ocegueda, Mike Amezcua, Fernando Hernandez, Julio Chavez and Raymon Ruiz

MRR: Maybe start by telling me how this constellation of people became Marrón.
Mike: Ray and I were trying to do something new after Descarados. We were just kinda jamming and stuff with friends, but nothing was really clicking. Then Ray met Julio, who lives near Ray, and that ended up being a good vibe. They were jamming really well. Then Ray called me up, and then as soon I knew we were going to practice and start writing songs, I called Fernando. I mean, we weren't to sure what the hell we were gonna sound like...

MRR: Right.
Mike: We knew we wanted to do something very melodic but kinda with a throwback flavor of DC style. So then we just started writing and right away recorded some demo songs. Mark is a recent addition. We had actually been toying around with the idea of inviting Mark to join the band.

MRR: Definitely, I feel that whole DC vibe, especially kinda speaks on the projects you and Ray have done before. Your record *Descarados* was kinda like Revolution Summer influenced the same with Esperanza and stuff. But with this band, are there any influences outside of the obvious Swiz influence or stuff from that era musically, or...?
Fern: I dunno, I think a lot of Bay Area stuff, right?
Raymon: I think a lot of Sarah Kirsch bands. She had a huge impact on us growing up.

MRR: Yeah, me too.
Raymon: So I mean, we just remember watching her play in her previous bands, hearing her speak and growing up in a rural area it was just mind blowing to me hearing those things. Not only her, but also seeing people like José Palofox, a Chicano playing drums in a punk band, it was very influential, at least to me.
Julio: Actually, when me and Ray met, that was the first bonding we had. We're both from the same rural area, and we both knew Sarah Kirsch bands, and to me that was just amazing.

MRR: That speaks to the other thing I wanted to talk about because I felt it was kinda obvious in watching you guys play at Gilman the other night, maybe in conversation with you a little bit Fernando, the whole thing about the scene somehow not having that whole confrontational style that it had back then as far as politics is concerned. I was wondering if you could speak on those kind of influences as well. Obviously, Sarah Krisch had a lot to say and contribute on that tip.
Fern: I think everybody here is super freakin' opinionated and has their view on it and can say so much. I was talking to Mike about seeing their bands back in the late '90s early 2000s, and that for me changed my life. To me, I see it as the experiences of people of color, historically and through colonization. And I know that's been talked about before, but like now there's all these ways to measure it, to write about it and to put it into context. I was thinking about this metaphor the other day about this this subculture is not the only subculture you can talk about these issues and politics. There're many paths that can lead you to being politicized. But for us it's kinda like a room, right, and punk is this key to that door for us, and this door opens up this other world, and it's up to us to decide what we're gonna do, walk through that door and what are we gonna do in that outside world. So now I look at it as these things in terms that are like measurable and occur in our daily lives. Each one of us is from a different location, but in many ways go through a lot of the same circumstances but in different capacities and different ways. They're from the High Desert, Hesperia and Victorville; I'm from Oxnard, an agricultural town; Mike's from South Central L.A.; and Mark is from San Bernardino. How would you describe San Bernardino?
Mark: San Bernardino is like in between, a mix of urban and rural.
Fern: There's always this fucked up shit going on with people of color. Around 2015, we saw what Donald Trump is saying and the situation in Charleston and things that have been done intentionally like issues in education, issues in health care, violence and the drug war that's going on in Latin America, infant mortality rates that happen in African-American communities, forced sterilization... it's these things that weave the way we live and our parents, the way they live. It's this historical trauma that's like tangible and exists through the work that our parents do.
Mike: As you know really well, the PCH was such an important venue that kinda came and went. But the cool thing about that space and many like them everywhere is that it's like a spark of energy and creativity were people come together. They have a shared interest but don't really know each other, and so it becomes this venue where you can really talk about ideas. I think that now, the stakes are so much higher because there's really nothing out there that promotes spaces that are independent or free of any corporate connection or free of any other oppressive institutions. I don't know what you guys were talking about the other day, but I think it was about saying something when you're playing a show, talking. That's a really amazing tradition with underground music. Not just punk, but within salsa, funk and with blues. So were just trying to return to some of that, getting some banter going. Even with social media, our attention span is so much shorter now, and we're niched into, like, our own particular things that we want, so hopefully we can disrupt that in between songs.
Mark: I think it's definitely one of the things Marrón does, that interplay between the band and the audience. Trying to network and develop ideas in these spaces and connect. I think that's something that Fern does really well. It's really inspiring to be a part of that because Fern has a gift when he's doing that, which I wish I would see more often. We were talking about that, how things seem to have gotten so complacent. There's still that musical connection you're getting, but it's not something deeper than that, with substance.

MRR: Yeah I totally felt that when you guys played. I think you did a good job, in my opinion, from what I was interpreting and what your sense of urgency was with lived experience. But you mention 2015—a lot has changed since then! Has that changed the way you approach politics in your music?
Mike: A lot has happened indeed since 2015, especially if we're referring to the election of Donald Trump, but a lot remains the same. In the culture and in policy we have had deeply-entrenched histories of anti-Blackness, anti-Latinx, anti-immigrant, anti-women, anti-Muslim, and countless other systemic attacks on people's humanity and mere existence that predate the election of Trump. There is a sense that because of him, his supporters feel more at liberty to express openly their feelings of white supremacy, xenophobia, and racial anxieties. Whether that is true or not, as a band, we feel like none of these are new developments, and that regardless of who was in office we would be speaking about these issues in our music and at our shows because these are attacks that have long been directed at our communities. With respect to being

MARRÓN

Today the geography of Marrón spans Oxnard, Hesperia, Victorville, Sacramento, New York City, and sometimes Washington, DC. The band has long struggled, in light of life's ways of shooting us in disparate directions, to maintain itself. But their sophomore LP, Terrenos, translates this dislocation into harmony. Mining everything from Swiz and Three to Sawhorse and Reason to Believe, the band takes thumbtacks and string to map a sound that is truly cross-country, holistic, and full; Revolution Summer never ended, nor did Ebullition Records ever slow down. Vocalist Fern Hernandez evokes a similar unity in the lyrics; he constellates North Americans together not by their commonality of experience or citizenship, but the bonds found in a shared humanity. The band brings to the fore intergenerational inequality, the legacy of colonization, and trauma, borders, violence, instability, struggle. But unlike the mass of today's art, Marrón does more than beg you to act: they understand why it's hard to, and they sympathize when you feel like you can't, when you feel like there's no point, when you feel like you can't "care" the nation-state out of its daily dehumanizations. Terrenos is, after all, more about consciousness than commands; less a political programme than an exploration of how this world works, what it's like to live in it, and what the next one—the better one—might look like.

Foreword by Dan Darrah.
Marrón artwork by Pavel Acevedo.
Photos by Dan Rawe.
Interview by Travis Igler.
Additional questions by Miranda Fisher.

Vancouver. Working in the oil industry is very dangerous.
Ashlee: I feel resilience is Vancouver's artist badge. Artists here have always worked under the weight of impending evictions and the stress of balancing the amount you need to work to be able to create in this city. You can hear it in the sound. There's an edge that it creates that is authentic to the experience of living in a city that regards its lower class as disposable.

MRR: The PNW (US cities and Vancouver) have a particular dark punk sound...I'm thinking of bands like Arctic Flowers, Criminal Code, Nü Sensae (RIP)...Do you feel you fit into this oeuvre? Or do you identify more with something else or a different scene?
Britt: Yes, I would say we fit into that category of sound and scene. We refer to that element of our sound as Cold Punk. It's a particular feel that I think is derived from the landscape, rain, and perhaps feelings of isolation. Other bands I would include here are Mutators and Stickers. We also have a love for, and seek inspiration from, the gritty, southern punk sound of bands like Ex-Cult, Institute, and Nots (one reason why we keep ending up touring and with records recorded/put out in Texas.) This has had an influence on our latest record, *Hounds*.

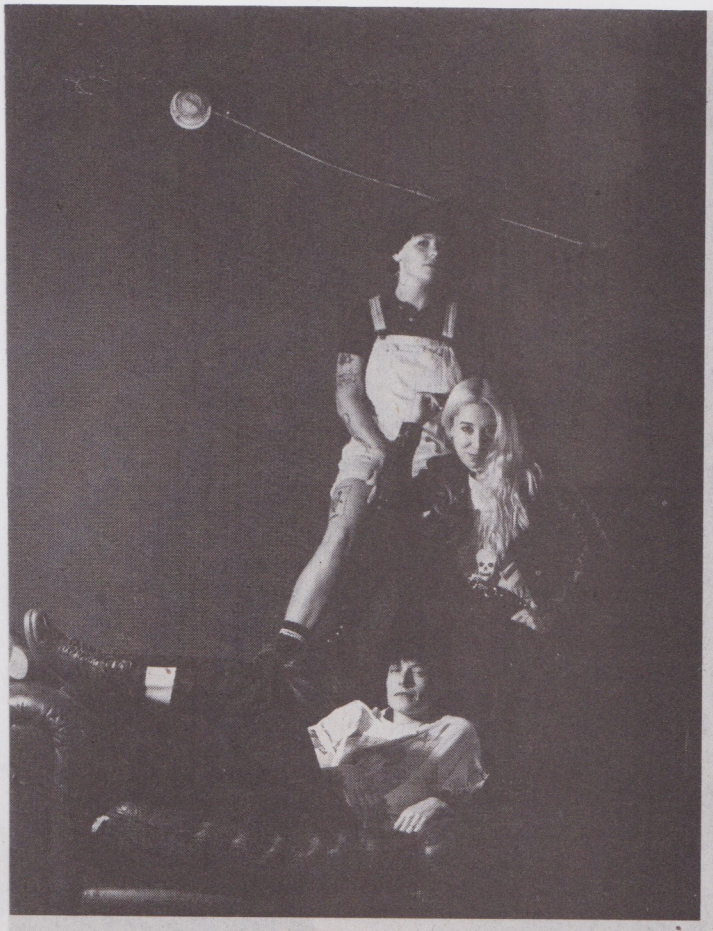
MRR: On your past two records, you've dealt with issues of sexual violence, the personal and political...What was your lyrical vision for *Hounds*? What you do envision people hearing / feeling when they listen to the new record?
Britt: *Hounds* is about inspiring a feeling of empowerment: the power to fight back against racist, misogynist, and economically oppressive systems. It's about pointing a finger and sneering at abusers and those who abuse power. Reminding them that we are not passive bystanders to injustice. With this record, I want people to feel energized, invigorated, and powerful...and I also want them to be able to just enjoy the music.

MRR: I'm really into your song, "Ethics," especially the lines, *"Fragility oh you're a saint / Pity he, blood on your face / My ethics they're running late /. Twist my arm, initiate."* What are your thoughts behind this song?
Britt: I've always enjoyed writing songs that can have multiple meanings or levels of meaning. I think it is more fun to leave the direct meaning up to the listener. I like to work with themes and allow for the specifics to be decided by each individual. This song deals with themes of gender expectations and Western cultural expectations of gender conformity. It also deals with themes of power imbalances and abuses, specifically within organized religion. These were the topics I was thinking about while writing the song.

MRR: What are your future plans for Lié?
Kati: Right now we are back in writing mode. It feels like we have been non-stop touring, so getting back into the rhythm of writing is feeling a bit daunting. We'd love to tour Mexico, Latin America, and South America! Hopefully starting in Mexico City. We are about to film our third music video for *Hounds* and are very excited to work with our friend Justin Gradin from Sex Negatives, Mutators, and Random Cuts. We'd also like to return to Europe!
Ashlee: Touring can be pretty draining and although hearing new bands provides inspiration, without any time to jam it can be hard to focus on writing, so I'm excited to take the winter to just spend time in the studio working on new ideas. Also really excited to be in a jam space with heat for the first time ever this winter!!

MRR: What local bands in Vancouver are grabbing your ear right now?
Kati: We played show on August 16th at the Black Lab with some local favourites, Kiss Painting and Chain Whip in support of Masculinity Crisis from Seattle. Newer locals that are catching our ear are Crumb, Body Break, Wire Spine, Necking, Little Sprout, Policy of Truth, and Wasted Breath in Vancouver, Cyberplasm in Olympia.

lievancouver.bandcamp.com
lievancouver.bandcamp.com



up and down the silhouette of a hill in the distance and had a beer, then set up a tent for me and Ash to crash out and Brit and Sam slept in the car. About two hours later a bright light and the loudest most intense noises of metal on metal woke up everyone but me. Was it the UFO that we all assumed would take us tonight, if any time? Nope, it was a freight train flying down the tracks about 30 or 40 feet from us. Because it was so dark, we hadn't even seen the tracks. Next morning we groggily headed to look at the Prada Marfa store, dusty and sun baked and perfectly out of place. We continued to Las Cruces, NM to play a venue by more train tracks...

Our first East Coast tour was with Surfbort in July 2016 and it was the coldest tour (besides the snow in Flagstaff, twice). I got a stomach flu on the day we left NY for our second show, and everyone intermittently caught it. On one particular winding section of the road, I got that feeling where you lose control of your jaw. I was gonna puke, but when? I knew I had no control, but maybe I could find a bag...nope. Just projectile vomit fest. It was mostly water but it did manage to get on the Surfbort merch tupperware. And it leaked. All over a Large "Penis Picasso" t-shirt, which was then given to me as a memento of our new bond with one of my favorite bands. Last time I wore the shirt, I got two compliments.

While on this tour, we were taken to visit the GWAR prop house and studio where they make all the stage pieces and costumes for live GWAR shows. There were Donald Trump and a Hillary Clinton statues and so much gory fun stuff to look at.

MRR: Last time I was up in Vancouver, our bands played together at an explicitly radical DIY space called the Black Lab, which reminded me a lot of squats and other autonomous spaces in Europe (particularly Germany). Can you talk about the space and its importance to the neighborhood it's in? How are you all involved? Are there other spaces like the Lab in Vancouver now?

Britt: The Black Lab is unique in Vancouver in that it is completely volunteer run and non-profit. It's also one of the few places in the city that can host early shows (no punk time) where people will actually show up. (Sound ordinance forces Black Lab to be done music by 11 pm, when shows normally are just getting started by that time.) We have played there many times, and sometimes book events for touring bands. It's an amazing crew of people who are dedicated to the scene. They host events that impact the downtown east side community, such as Narcan training, fundraisers, and all the shows are sliding scale. We love Black Lab!!!

MRR: Gentrification is a force that seems to be affecting every major city right now, but I've heard it's hitting Vancouver particularly hard. How has your scene coped with it?

Britt: Spaces get closed down on the regular, and people are broke from having to spend all their money on rent. There has been an exodus. People are being forced to move to cheaper cities like Montreal. However, Vancouver is resilient. Whenever a space shuts down people band together and another one rises from the ashes. Electronic music and synth / drum machine based bands are on the rise. Possibly because there is no space to keep your drum kit and practice spaces are not cheap? (I'm only half kidding here!)

Kati: Friends in Dead Soft (Arts and Crafts) have moved into the deep suburbs before they begin a few month long tour to save on rent, with an hour and a half commute daily for work, each way. Other friends happily moved away for more nature and less traffic and bought a Prius for the few trips to Vancouver that they do make.

Vancouver is uniquely walkable and dense, for the 1% who live in penthouse condos. The early 2000s teachings of urban densification dictated a lot of design of tall residential towers along the picturesque seawall parks and dog parks downtown with walkable neighborhoods, but these are all for the 1% that the tourists see while driving though on the way to Whistler. The infrastructure of the city is not sound for the population that it holds, even in the rich areas. Police and Parks Board enforcement officers move homeless people out of the view of the rich temporary workers who come to Vancouver for six months before moving away. The only saving grace for the people who live in the downtown towers is that a good portion of those condominiums sit empty due to the major investment force of people from across the world who purchased condos for part-time living in safe, quaint Vancouver (or for part of the family). In the poor areas, bedbugs are rampant and houses are illegally divided into multiple suites. People who work low wage jobs can't afford to live in the communities where they work, nor pay for their children's needs, just like gentrification all over the world. This also causes some of our friends to head to the Tar Sands in Alberta to make money to afford to live in

since the beginning, especially considering Canada is founded on the systematic genocide of tens of thousands of Indigenous people and continues to oppress minority groups through the "justice," education, and economic systems put in place by colonialism. In contrast to the current "in your face fascism" of the US (specifically thinking of the Trump administration and the Muslim ban for example), I think Canadian systems like to try and mask the racist ideologies and oppressive tendencies in bureaucratic jargon, and economics (cramming through unwanted pipelines for example). I think that because we aren't producing easily digestible music, it's never going to be music that is accessible in any mainstream way, but I do like to think that the messages we put out into the ether with our music are landing somewhere, and creating conversations that can extend out into that broader political climate (beyond the border and the mountains that encase Vancouver).

MRR: You all play in other projects, please tell us about them! Also, some of your other projects include electronic music...how does the mode of electronic expression differ from the acoustic quality of drums / bass / guitar?

Britt: I've played in Koban (post-punk with drum machines) for almost ten years and, more recently, SIGSALY (dance music influenced by techno, minimal-wave, industrial). I find I enjoy creating electronic music because it lifts and liberates me. The creative possibilities seem endless, and that is exciting. I've always needed to move and been very in my body, and it just feels good to be making music where I can do that, and that encourages others to do the same. Programming, producing, and learning about new equipment has also been an exciting new challenge.

Ashlee: I have an electronic project with my partner called Minimal Violence. I've been lucky enough to have lots of opportunity to tour with this project and see places I never imagined I would. A big part of electronic music to me is the community and culture that surround it. There is a focus on knowledge exchange and celebration of difference that, to be honest, I have never really felt in the punk community. Also, on the other end of the spectrum, electronic music allows me the freedom to create from beginning to end without having to work with any outside sources. It can be a completely independent form of music. In that way, it almost feels more punk than punk. I can make music out of any sound I want, use any machine I want, even throw some guitar in there, and I don't need to go to a studio or work with a recording engineer.

Kati: I play in a queer female punk band called SBDC. SBDC is shopping around a newly recorded full length album. Recorded at Raincity Recorders in Vancouver by Jesse Gander and is waaay power pop. With a band member newly located in Chatanooga, TN, we are looking forward to a southern tour!

MRR: You've done some touring in Europe as well as Canada and the US. Got any good tour stories?

Kati: There's been so much traveling as of late that the tours are all blending together now. *[laughter]* We'd like to release a book one day.

On our first long tour to SXSW in 2014, we played a show in Marfa, TX, which was all very surreal and amazing. Lié

was touring with Koban, so it was me, Ash, Brit, and Sam all driving my dad's pickup truck. We made a mysterious stop at a local mini-mart at one point in the land of Dollar-General-is-the-grocery-store and truck high tumbleweeds. Ash bought a disposable camera, which had mysterious crystalized powder shaking around inside it. (It also had been taped together by hand with a clearly ancient exposed roll of film that didn't match the brand shoddily installed into the plastic camera body.) After what was most likely an unnecessary bout of paranoia, we ditched the camera in a roadside trash can...the pics would have probably been sick, though. We drove on and arrived in Marfa dazed from driving hours south out of Austin. It was St. Patrick's Day weekend, so the locals were bar hopping and down to cut a rug. The venue was called Padre's, which was an old mortuary, re-fashioned into a long bar across from a stage. The bathrooms were the old embalming room, and the funerals seemed to have been held in the main show room. It had a sacred feeling with two-story-high ceilings. The show was great, and one of the attendees at the show was a tall older gentleman with long white hair and beard. He happened to also be wearing all white: white cowboy boots, white jeans, white button up shirt, and a white cowboy hat (maybe a white vest too?). I wanted to say hello and check if he was a real wizard, but he disappeared into the night. Lots of people at the show told us about the Marfa Lights, so we decided to go check it out after the show with a few folks who were still kicking it. We decided to camp out at the Marfa Lights viewing area and quickly hit the road in the morning. We watched the spooky inexplicable lights move

MRR: *Hounds* is your third LP, following up *Truth or Consequences* and *Consent*. How has your sound evolved over time? What experiences as a band have influenced this change, if at all?

Ash: Over time, we have fused the discordant influence of Vancouver's earlier days (Night Prison / Emergency Room era) with a more driving, heavy, feel. The No Wave influences that drove No LA Kill (me and Kati's initial project together) are employed in a less literal sense, while still driving towards dissonance. The strained space that the lyrics create, is different on *Hounds*, more gentle than on *Truth or Consequences* even though they have deal with content matter related to violence, oppression, and generally dark matter. Some folks have pointed out that we employ more melodic vocal structures on *Hounds*, and we definitely experimented with that. It almost became a struggle with songs like "Birthday Party," where we weren't sure if it needed to be toned down, but ended up loving it. I think our confidence in the band, be it from finally deciding to never fit into a genre, having record label support, or from working successfully together for so many years on many levels (music / booking / art), allows for us to experiment with various sounds and not be too tied down.

MRR: Where do you find inspiration to make noise?

Kati: Before I was integrated in the music community, my ideas and inspiration came out in the form of photography, in the methods I had learned at art school, about the topics we discussed there, and it was very specific and calculated, visual. When I started drumming, drumming was never in the place of photography, but my path with music was completely opposite, having no specific elements (in a way) and I could improvise on many levels, not just academic ideas of the season. I have learned that making noise and performing definitely satisfied a different, less specific, need of expression, but a completely fulfilling aspect of art making, more emotional.

Britt: Music is one of my many forms of therapy. When I produce my best writing, it always comes from a place of pure emotion. It becomes a release for feelings of rage, fear, grief, uncertainty, injustice, and a wide array of other difficult emotions. I am inspired when I feel these things boiling up and I need to let them go. I might even re-experience events that triggered these feelings, and through playing them I am able to move through them. Eventually, I may not even feel the need to play those songs anymore, or they take on new meanings.

Ashlee: I don't feel like I've ever had any other form of expression aside from making noise. It's the way I've learned to communicate my feelings, be it with words or sound. But inspiration is not infinite, and I've definitely gone through some low periods where I struggle to find inspiration. I don't actually have an answer as to how to overcome that block, though...I do find one time I'm almost always inspired is on tour. I feel like it's a combination of seeing new bands every night and driving for hours every day listening to a collection of familiar music and new gems, all the while not having the time to work on music yourself. It always makes me eager to return home and try out new ideas.

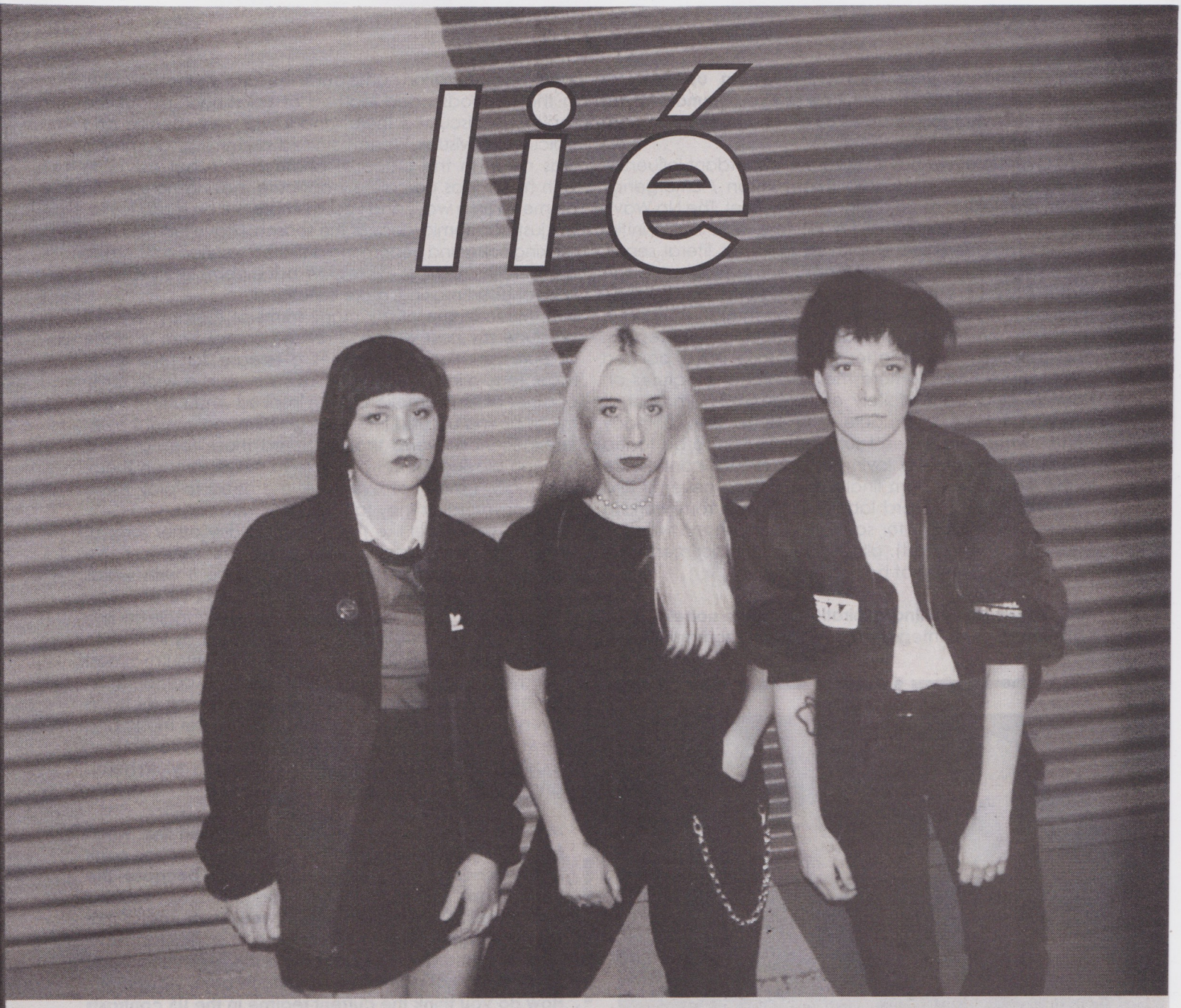
MRR: It's a personal observation on my part that when fascist regimes rise in power and prominence, punk music tends to go more underground because the mainstream media is looking for music to "soothe" the masses. On a related note, I would also argue that large western countries (Amerikkka in particular) have been to some degree fascist since the beginning, and I know this is not a uniquely American punk viewpoint... How do you think the current regime in the US contrasts with what's been happening in Canada, and what are your thoughts on punk's musical accessibility in terms of broader political climates?

Kati: Maybe this is why Lié isn't in regular distribution channels? Our politics are too challenging and we are suppressed by the tentacles of the fascist systems?

Right now I go through waves of aggression against the privilege that I see so much of it in punk that I am, at times, truly disgusted. Then I remember that huge moves have been made against sexual assault in multiple Vancouver music scenes and I remember that we are working on our slow, broken selves, which is progress, even if we can't fix capitalism. I see growth in the advances of callout culture and am so happy that it is generally accepted that making a call out is necessary, but expulsion and exclusion is not the answer, community healing is needed.

Britt: I agree that Western countries have been fascists

lié



Hailing from Vancouver, BC, the powerful noisemongers of Lié play an ultra-intense take on Cold Punk while singing about issues of the "dark matter" that lies beneath the Emerald City they call home (and beyond). I first got into the band when I saw them in a basement in Vancouver several winters ago and I've been following them ever since. Read on to learn about their near-encounter with a UFO on tour, life in Vancouver in a wave of brutal gentrification, music as a means of therapy and survival, the effects of fascism on music, and the freedom found within electronic music.

Interview by Megan March.

Photos by Andi Icaza and Lauren Ray.

go through that on a daily basis. I struggle with being across the country while my family is dealing with their lives. I'm on vacation right now while shit is falling apart and the world is burning. It's these strange parallels but you don't not deserve to be happy. That's what I take from those Motion City Soundtrack songs, and what I hope people interpret from our songs. We're about honoring your fucking soul, and you deserve to honor what you have, whatever that may be.

Rose: I'll share a pop punk story. I grew up playing violin, listening to bands like Yellowcard—the pop punk violin thing. I'm from a Chicago suburb with a lot of conservative Christian kids, and my first band experience was playing violin in a weird pop punk / emo group with some of them. Eventually they kicked me out and replaced me with a less faggy, less Jewish violinist. So pop punk has some emotional resonance for me. And I feel like a lot of the musicians that Wes was talking about—people like Gerard Way or Pete Wentz—they were told to be boys growing up, but were unable to perform masculinity in quite the right ways. That's something I obviously identify with a lot, too, and I think I bring that with me into my role in Choked Up.

Mia: I grew up in Torrance, a part of LA. I really like what Rose is saying about Yellowcard, because I love Yellowcard. I appreciate the wording that Wes used earlier about how all these white, hetero, cis, toxic masculine bands that we grew up perpetuate patriarchy in a certain way, but they also speak to experiences of failing to participate in patriarchy in a successful way. This whole conversation about representation in pop punk just makes me laugh sometimes, because none of the kids I grew up with listening to pop punk were white. I grew up in a community that was 75% Asian, and that's just Asian: Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Burmese, Vietnamese, Taiwanese. On top of that, another 10% Latinx people. There was a sprinkling of white kids in there, but we were all kids of color listening to this music. Alkaline Trio, Green Day, Yellowcard, Rancid, they were all introduced to me by people of color. I wasn't hanging out with white boys who introduced this into my life, it was people of color recognizing struggle and oppression within each other, and this was just the language we had. Since moving to New York is when I've seen the most white boy bands. Specifically, about how Wes was talking about failing to participate in patriarchy in a certain way, I myself am an Asian person, and growing up in a community of so many Asian young men of all different ethnicities and races, pop punk was so precious to us because of that message. It tied so well with how these young men were experiencing racial oppression through the emasculation of their own identities. I grew up in a high school where people would say, "You're so gay—you're Asian." Even though 75% of the school was Asian kids, that was still the mentality and the idea of how we were supposed to be treated and treat each other. Imagine that you go to Buddhist temple on Saturday morning, you go to violin practice, after school you go to Kumon, and late at night you lay in bed crying listening to Yellowcard because that's the thing that speaks to all attempts to overcome oppression, which still fails at a certain point. That failure needs some sort of recognition. Even though all of the faces of the bands were white boys, they were talking about the experiences of people of color, women, and queer people. And they get paid for it! Also, hi, I'm Mia, I'm the roadie for Choked Up.

MRR: Thank you for chiming in, Mia!

Mia: Yeah! I want to give them space to talk, but I just want to say I wouldn't just hop in the van with any band. The content of Cristy's songs means a lot to me! During your set, when you say things like, "This is a song about finding isolation," or, "This is a song for all the queer people of color," it means a lot.

Cristy: Aw, yeah! "Lomes Y Chisme" is about finding queer femmes of color community. It also relates to finding queer people at all. I'm from Miami, and I grew up in a Latinx punk scene. All my best friends who I went to shows with, wrote zines with, played music with, we were all Latinx punks doing our thing and empowering each other. But I wanted queer and feminist community really badly. There's an amazing activist / punk community in Miami that's fluctuated over the years, but during my time in 1999 I couldn't find it. I thought everyone was in the Bay. Eventually I made my way up to New York—my friends understood I needed to go be a unicorn somewhere. Miami is a red city, although it's predominantly Spanish-speaking and very mixed, so you get in the punk scene and it's even more mixed, as punk is inherently about welcoming our differences. So I did meet lots of different people from different backgrounds...but I ended up in a very bro-y pop punk scene that I felt very ugly and wrong in, despite it being Latinx. The scene seemed welcoming to jocks and I didn't know how to live. Participating in shows felt really hard, even though there was this life of POC punk and comfort there. So, "Lomes Y Chisme" is about finally seeing yourself in your cultural community.

Mia: When I listen to that song with you all every night, it's beautiful to me in many ways because you all were the band that I was waiting for as a kid. Every time I hear that song, I still get a little choked up *[laughter]* from watching the audience listen to it, because so much of that song resonates with the idea that we've gone through all that, too, and we're still here.

Cristy: Yeah, let's cry! Let's get choked up!

chokedup.bandcamp.com

these new songs that you haven't recorded yet. It made me think about the pressure of the music industry, even within punk, to be productive, record, and engage with this set of rules that was created by a marketing department.

Rachel: Yeah, which is changing all the time!

Cristy: And social media taking over! I'm old, I don't understand social media!

Rachel: We've talked about how to use Instagram, since Facebook is nearly irrelevant at this point. Like, we're not going to pay for ads.

Cristy: I've paid for ads, and they work...so annoying and fucked up!

Rachel: It's just fucked up that with Instagram, Snapchat, and shit, you don't even have to post about things that you're getting ready to do, like recording or playing a show or going on tour. You can just post a picture of you sitting in a chair with a neat font underneath saying something irrelevant. It's weird that it's what bands do these days to keep people's attention, to actively be posting shit even if it has nothing to do with being productive with band things.

Cristy: It's like just showing the world you exist.

Rose: And when you're marginalized people, too, that kind of visibility isn't always something that you want. It's really uncomfortable being forced to present yourself in a certain way in order to be consumed by the communities that you're trying to reach.

Wes: Constantly consumed.

Cristy: Yeah. It's like, we all want private lives for different reasons. Rose isn't even on Instagram; she's the punkest.

Rose: But then it's like, I can't contribute to the labor of producing ourselves for the internet. Those choices have consequences in a really horrible way.

Cristy: I got rid of all social media in 2013, and it was amazing for my mental health. I was like, "I love my work. I'm going to connect to my ancestral magic. My band is falling apart, but I'll live! I'm going to finish my tarot card deck and go to grad school!" And I did it all! Near the end of grad school, I realized I had to do a Kickstarter for the tarot deck because it was too intersectional for funding...That project was this weird thing where I *knew* it could have a lot of impact and be successful, I just needed social media to fundraise for it and sell it.

MRR: Yeah, it's gross! Anyway, I really appreciate the things you say between songs, especially talking about trauma, relationships, and the idea of "no such thing as damaged goods."

Cristy: Yeah! I love feelings. As you all know, I love bands like Green Day, Crimpshrine, and Tilt. They weren't specifically talking about politics, like Rancid songs that are about homelessness or drug abuse. They were talking about inherently political feelings—isolation, depression. That's what's always influenced my song writing, these bands that were writing about feelings, survival, and love songs that didn't really sound like love songs. I related to these songs that were about falling in love, but it being laced with so much trauma. Before sexual assault trauma, the songs I was writing were fun, storytelling like Pinhead Gunpowder songs. After experiencing trauma, I started writing angry punk songs, and then it turned into a mix of the angry punk songs and love songs. The Homewreckers had a lot of songs that were about, like, loving someone when you can't really be in their life because of trauma, mental health, distance—not because they're not calling you. There were a lot of songs about my experience as a Cubana, songs about gentrification, but they're all love songs. It's like, here's a song about trying to be in love and enjoy a human while your city is falling apart. Choked Up songs are similar, too. A lot of the songs are like, "You're really cute, and you're staring at me, and I think we like each other, but we're both very depressed so how do we do this?" Knock on wood, I don't have anything traumatic going on right now, so I've been articulating past experiences. Of course there are traumas we'll all be processing for the rest of our lives, but I feel like I've written so much about those traumas that now I'm excited to write about engaging in love and joy, but feeling fucked up while doing so. And about having magical connections with people who are totally inaccessible but still give you life. And about how maybe it's not really about fucking and having a partner, but about experiencing love. A lot of the songs are about that, too: the concept of loving versus having someone to snuggle with. The songs have a lot of the same themes. I still hate the government, I hate having to deal with this world as an abuse survivor, but writing songs about healing from trauma is just going to happen. Even if I write a song about liking someone, it's probably going to be a little morbid.

Wes: For me, in terms of content and what's read as political or not, I got into pop punk through early 2000s stuff like Fall Out Boy, the Used, My Chemical Romance, etc. One of the things that I loved about *Under the Cork Tree*—the first Fall Out Boy album I interacted with—was that it was all about being a loser, not being able to get your shit together, and not being able to participate in patriarchy in the right ways. Even though it was a bunch of white dudes, I interpreted it as an album for sad trans boy feels, you know? Like, not being able to participate in patriarchy because, say, you can't be with the prettiest girl in school, which is a stupid idea, but it's inherently political. You've got all that stuff about patriarchy, racism, and ableism. But I feel like queer people have been doing this forever—reading into the stuff they've appropriated from us in the music they get paid for. Doing that helped me continue to own the genre and content, and it's been interesting interacting with that. There are some songs that I feel have to do with being a man and experiencing sexual assault and not having anyone take you seriously or think that's a bad thing. It's interesting seeing the bands that straddle the line between talking about real shit like de-internalizing patriarchy, or being a man who's experienced sexual assault, with also being super misogynistic by blaming women for everything bad that's happened to them. For me, it's been walking a thin line between the people we have to represent us and the actual real things that they're talking about. Anyway, *Under the Cork Tree* is my sad trans boy middle school anthem.

Cristy: My sad pansexual anthem is *Coming Clean* by Green Day.

Rachel: On the topic of not being able getting your shit together and being a hot mess, my album would be *Commit This to Memory* by Motion City Soundtrack. That shit made me be like, "Fuck New Found Glory!" They helped me work through the idea of just feeling like you don't deserve to be happy. You can have whatever community, you have whatever support systems and coping mechanisms, but you just don't know how to enjoy what you deserve to enjoy. I

that feel so entitled to their time on stage with their weird inside jokes non-stop, isolating everybody who isn't their friend. Me being this shy, little, brown kid—one of four brown kids at these shows—I was like, "This sucks, this is shitty, I guess I won't do this." But as I started playing music more when I got older, I went back to pop punk. It felt like the best vehicle for me to do me. I have another band with Wes, called Gibbons, which started with the solo stuff I wrote when I first coming out of my little egg.

Cristy: We almost did those songs, but I was like, "No, there should be *more* bands fronted by us!"

Rachel: Yeah, and it wasn't like the songs wouldn't work for Choked Up, but they were my songs and I wanted to do them however my vision was. And I'm in another band called Universe Ignore Her, with two Staten Island vocalists who are also POC: My goal is to take those fucking spaces over. Along the lines of what Cristy said, it's like, "I'm uncomfortable and I don't wanna be here, but I'm gonna find a way to be comfortable. I'm not gonna wait for the door to open for me because it never will and I'm gonna have to open it myself." It's a slow climb, but we want Staten Island to be more inclusive to everybody.

Wes: The stuff folks are talking about is a testament to what happens when something becomes an industry, whatever discipline, whether it's art or something outside of art. The types of people, bodies, and conversations that are marketable are who get the resources. People just throw resources at them. It's easy to pinpoint throughout history where women, queer people, and people of color have been totally overlooked by people with tons of resources. Inevitably, they give the resources to those who are marketable...

Cristy: And easier to deal with...

Wes: Yeah, and these folks get famous, and then that's the face, the representation of the pop punk musician. They all look the same because that's what marketable. It's not a coincidence. We invented rock music, we invented punk, we invented all this shit, because it's about people with hard fucking lives who don't get resources just for nothing, just for existing. Quite the opposite! And we don't show up in the documentaries, even though we were there. It's important to me to point out how intentional these choices are on the part of industry, people with resources, and stolen wealth. I'm not surprised at all that it's so hard for us to get resources from these people who stand to lose a lot from our message, you know? Oppressing people so that they don't retaliate against the things they've done. So much happens away from the public eye. That's how erasure happens, and we talk a lot about erasure of queer people, queer people of color, women, people who invented the genre. That's something that I'm keeping in mind, and trying to really watch for when those things are happening to us. When it starts with small compromises on our identities, small compromises on things we can and can't say. When it turns into, like, "Y'all couldn't get it together to depoliticize yourselves and make yourselves a little prettier, so you gotta go. You can't play this fest, you can't get these resources, you can't get thousands of bucks for not even knowing how to play your instrument." The places we feel safest are the places that stuff just doesn't happen, where people have proven to us that they care about taking care of each other. For myself, being a queer person of color and a musician, that's something I'm looking out for when building community and giving myself so fully to community—seeing people's ethics around how to treat each other.

MRR: Something you said at your San Francisco show stood out to me. You have your demo, but you said you also have all

a friend in the band, not just a sick bass player. Then Rose came in!

Rose: I also play bass in Koyt Far Dayn Fardakht, an anti-Zionist Yiddish punk band that's mostly trans women, so I already had that experience of collaborating around similar identities or politics. I was looking for a project that would be a little more active. I've always loved pop punk, but being queer or trans, at a certain point when you're growing up, it becomes really hard to engage with that world. It seemed amazing to have an opportunity to play that type of music in a non-hostile setting.

MRR: Let's talk about that. As a fellow lover of pop punk, I know it's a bold decision to make to play pop punk when you start a band.

Cristy: I just think the heart wants what it wants; it's not a decision. It's what I poop. It's what I vomit. I can't help it. But it's true...there was an era of not listening to pop punk, and it was following a very difficult time in my life that involved misogyny, abuse, and sexual assault in the punk scene. I quit bands that offended me, like the Nobodys, but also bands I deeply respected, like Ambition Mission. At that time, I felt like I needed to get away from pop punk—like in order to be a feminist and a musician and to be taken seriously, I needed to play a different genre of music. Until one day, when I felt stronger and older, someone put on Rancid, and my soul shot out of my face! I started writing songs again! I think it's important for me to keep doing this, to write the songs that come out of me. I definitely listen to a lot of '70s and '80s power pop, Latinx pop, musicals, and melody-driven music, and I do have feelings about pop punk institutions and men running shit and keeping the silence. But this is our first tour out here since the world has been changing and people are talking about healing from abuse in mainstream platforms. There are a lot of current bands I'm excited about, and it feels like maybe we're back in a magical haven of politicized pop punk??

Rachel: Feels like it, actually! Like we just walked into a whole other world.

Cristy: Yeah! I can't change what comes out of me. Last thing I'll say is that I know there are a lot of people in power, and people in bands, and bands in power that are rape apologists. I don't want to associate with them, but I don't feel scared to say my piece, interact with people who piss me off, and fight for my words. I don't feel afraid to do what I need to. Like, with the Homewreckers, we retreated to this queer feminist bubble—but even that has its imperfections. Our community is not immune to oppressive behavior. So now I'm like, "Fuck it! Let's do all the things!" It's awesome having each other and feeling safe. We're excited to do this for the rest of our lives. Who fucking knows what douchebags we'll deal with in the future, but I feel like as long as we hold on to our narratives and keep doing our thing, we'll can just take over the shitty institutions.

MRR: Warped Tour's over.

Cristy: Warped Tour's over!!

Rachel and Wes: Yeah!! [*clapping*]

Wes: Another dinosaur.

Cristy: Honestly, I love so many bands that were shooting to play Warped Tour, but it's like...are we all gonna have to do what War On Women did? Is that part of the trek to the top? I totally love and respect what they did—calling out the Dickies for violent humor on the last tour. But that's so much work and emotional labor for the sake of holding down an institution...And you all have this different world of pop punk...

Rose: We all came up in different punk eras.

Rachel: New Found Glory, Blink-182, and Green Day were my introduction to whatever pop punk was, from age seven on. I had no friends, so the music made up for that. Then, as I got older, my taste developed more towards metal, and I had my Metallica phase (which hasn't gone away). It was when I was thirteen that I realized I needed a guitar, and because of Metallica. Then I had a death metal phase, which I wish I was in California for, because all my favorite bands from that era were coming up then. But I never, ever stopped caring about pop punk. It was hard to find people to play with, because while I loved this heavier music, I just wanted to sing about feelings, if not dumb shit. When I was coming up in high school, there were a few Staten Island pop punk bands. For anyone unfamiliar with Staten Island: it's a horrible place, and it's a very red borough. All of the bands are these douchey bros, these teenagers

MRR: Hi everybody! Who are you? What do you do in Choked Up? What pronouns do you use?
Cristy: I'm Cristy Road. I sing, play guitar, write the lyrics, and have a lot of feelings. I use she / her pronouns.
Rachel: My name is Rachel. I play guitar and occasionally sing. She / her pronouns.
Wes: I'm Wes, he / him, I play drums.
Rose; I'm Rose, she / her, I play bass.

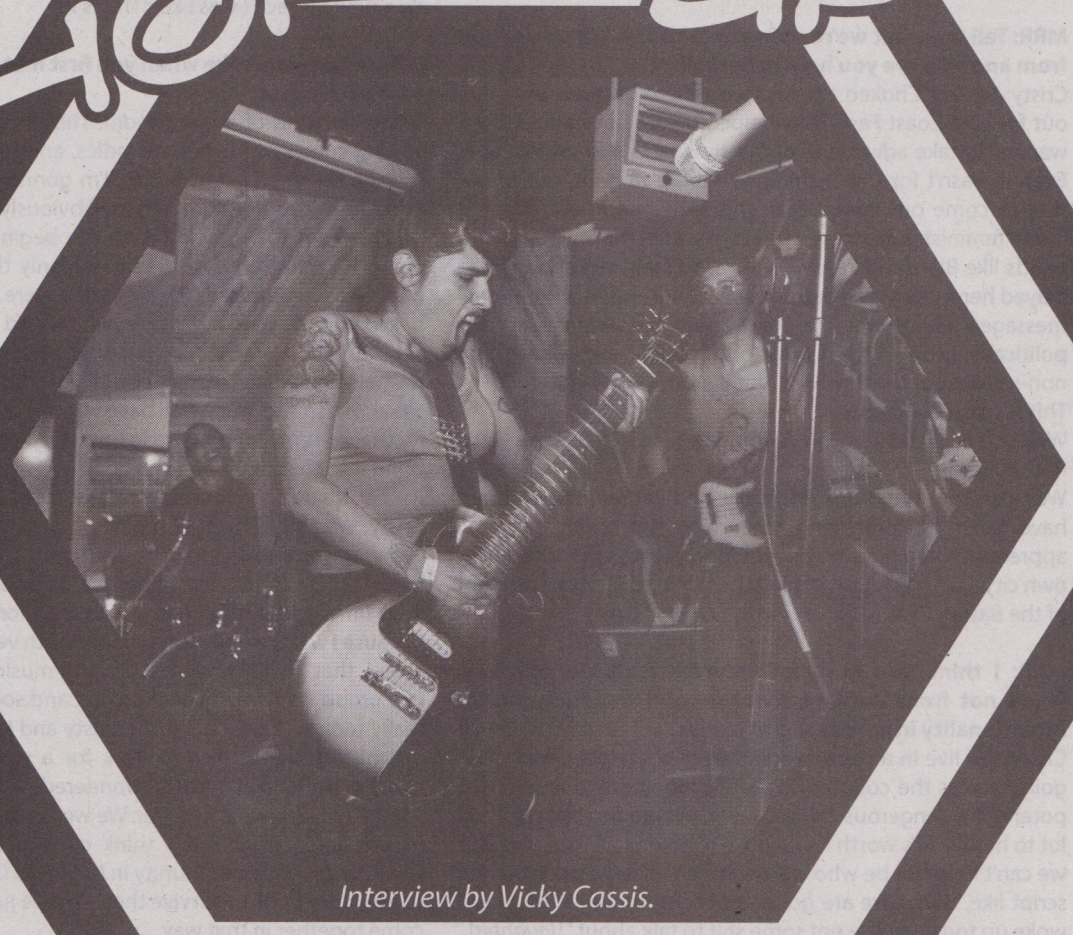
MRR: Tell me what we're doing here today. Where are you from and why are you here in Berkeley?
Cristy: We are Choked Up, and we're here because we came out for Lost Coast Fest. They helped us get out here, and we wanted to take advantage of our time here and do this tour. Even it wasn't for that, I think we would've gone out of our way to come out here, because it feels important. The first queer feminist punk scene I heard of was in the Bay Area, with bands like Blatz and Pansy Division. So far, every show we've played here, people are introducing songs, having intentional messages. It's not even that these shows feel like intentionally political spaces—it's just how it is. I could be idealizing as a non-resident of the Bay Area, but it's very exciting to be here. This is our second tour.
Wes: This is my first time in California.
Rachel: Same!
Wes: I'm from the Bronx originally, and I agree. These shows have been an interesting vibe; very welcoming, which I appreciate. Even in New York you don't always get that, in my own city. But, you know, it might be different if I was a resident of the Bay.

MRR: I think you have an accurate read. As someone who's not from the Bay, living here, I definitely notice intentionality in spaces and at shows.
Cristy: We live in a shitty world. Being queer people of color going across the country do stuff is inherently this stressful, potentially dangerous thing. Queer people in airports...it's a lot to handle. It's worth it when we're here playing shows, but we can't help but be who we are. It's not like we sit down and script like, "What are are gonna politicize tonight?" It's like, "I woke up today, so I've got some shit to talk about." [*laughter*]

MRR: What brought Choked Up together?
Cristy: I've been writing songs and playing in bands and fronting bands since the mid-'90s, and I've always had this punk focus and trajectory of keeping it DIY. As opposed to my art, music has always felt like this sacred thing where I didn't even want people to ask me about it—just come to the show if you understand what's going on. I was very focused on this family ideal as far as bandmates, and playing with very specific kinds of musicians that are from my community and have the same exact life goals as me. Then the Homewreckers—my band of eight years—broke up in 2016, and I knew I wanted to do this new band differently. It was magical that you all just popped up; I wasn't even trying to start a queer band. When I first met Rachel, I was like, "Yo, we might play with some straight white dudes because I wanna play pop punk."
Rachel: And I was like, "Such is life. Here we go."
Cristy: Yeah, we were like, "Fuck it." But I feel very blessed, very grateful to play with these three. We all met each other in this organic way.
Rachel: Choked Up is my first band ever in life. I met Cristy when she spoke at a Women in Rock panel, it was very 1990s. Two things that she said stood out: Green Day, and how hard it is to put yourself out there and form a band when people either dismiss you or flake out on you. I knew I had to tell her how much I felt that, because I've tried to put a band together for a very long time, but just put it on the backburner for years. So, when I finally met Cristy, Homewreckers broke up a few months later, and she said she still wanted to write stuff and do a new project. I was like, "This is it!"

MRR: What was it like when you first met up to share songs with each other?
Cristy: I'm kind of a band mom. This is what I do. I've been writing songs with lyrics, melodies, and basic song structure forever. So when I start bands, I'm gonna bring that, hoping other folks contribute their part. Obviously I'm stoked if other people want to write songs. In the beginning, we tried out doing Rachel's songs, too, but suddenly the idea of being a band was legitimized. Rachel and I were like, "OK, now we need drummer and a bass player." We had this vision of what we wanted this to be—I knew it would work the second Rachel showed up to practice in a Boys t-shirt. We all love the same '90s sound, but we all have very different obsessions and focuses in terms of how we learned how to play and what we bring into the songs.
Rachel: It's a very interesting playlist in the car.
Cristy: We all like musical theater, though. We all meet at the Green Day musical.
Wes: This is not my first band. I've been playing drums for a long time, and I've been in bands for a long time. It's mostly because I was a weird high schooler with very few friends, and I think that's when you start playing music. Getting together in a group was a really cool project and social structure that I really took to. For Choked Up, Cristy and I had been in QPOC organizing scenes in New York for a while. I had admired Cristy's work, and always wondered what it'd be like to someday play music with her. We were adjacent to each other in similar communities. I think coming together from the QPOC organizing community in New York City, a lot of us have to be pretty punk to survive there. So, we just kind of naturally come together in that way.
Cristy: I made a post on Queer Exchange. It said something like, "Two lonely Latinx punks looking for our third." It was a magical gift that the original lineup was all Latinxs from New York City. Having that was this really weird foundation for me, having only played music with white folks. They were best friends and family, but there's just something when you can have this shared experience that is the point of your isolation your whole life. When Rachel and I first met, we were coming from such different places, but it felt like meeting my best friend in high school at the Green Day concert. We're both women of color, but we felt isolated from our cultural communities. I love finding each other through isolation, and coming together to make a beautiful thing.
Wes: I think there's a lot to be said for the networks of queer folks that went into the formation of the band but also that keep us going on tour. That's been the most important thing for me, networks of queer people trying to survive together, giving each other a chance to travel, do new things, meet new people, and share our music.
Cristy: By the time the bass player—an old friend—left, I felt like I raised my bar a little bit. I felt like we needed to have

CHOKED UP



Interview by Vicky Cassis.

Photos by Jonathan Botkin and Kate Hoos.

I knew seeing Choked Up on their recent West Coast Tour was going to be awesome, but I didn't expected to actually get choked up while watching them play. Here we have a pop punk band that sounds just like bands that made me fall in love with the drama, but they're delivering it from the perspective of people who want to keep trying despite having been through some shit. Their message is incredibly relatable to punks who've experienced isolation and trauma, and I'm so glad they let me sit down with them and put this interview together. For fans of over-sharing, queer friendship, and Green Day.

Name of the Father when I was quite young and being fascinated with it all.

The song itself came at the end of me reading a book called *On Dead Ground* by Raymond Gilmour [a volunteer in the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) and Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA)]. "Creggan Shops" is by no means about Gilmour himself but was simply source material for a time and place. I recently did an interview for a Northern Irish paper out of Derry and the headline was "Australian singer pens song about Raymond Gilmour," which is an inflammatory comment as Gilmour is a hated man in some households of Northern Ireland and I specifically wrote the song from the neutral perspective of a child brought up in a household of split ideals. I got a message from a Sinn Feinn Supporter asking why the hell I'm writing about Gilmour!

I have a friend in Derry, and he assures me that the interview was taken well by all of those he spoke to about it, so that eased my mind some.

My Derry friend's name is Rory, and he plays in a band called Strength NI. Rory contacted us after hearing "Creggan Shops" though a mate of his and was very interested in how a Melbourne band is writing about his hometown. Strength NI recorded a response track of sorts called "1956 Olympics." It's about colonialism and genocide in Australia juxtaposed with lyrics about the Shifters. When and if we play in Europe, we will for sure be stopping in Derry.

MRR: On some of your records it's written, "The Shifters acknowledge the Wurundjeri people as the traditional owners of the land on which these songs were written and recorded. " It caught my attention.
When we first started releasing music, we didn't expect to ever be heard or even release as much as we have. As time has gone on, it has become apparent that we have an audience. We release records that have a reception and are distributed internationally. We have a responsibility to use the opportunities presented to us fairly. The Wurundjeri people are the traditional custodians of the land where we live, write, and perform as musicians. It is important to acknowledge that the history of "Australia" is not an honest or fair history. The Australian government has never respected and continues to undermine indigenous culture. To suppress and ignore culture is extremely ignorant, as to do so mutes positive progression.

MRR: What about the song "Algeria"? Have you been there?
No, I've never been. "Algeria" is about SS soldiers gaining anonymity and the possibility of eventual freedom by joining the French Foreign Legion at the end of World War II. If applicants gain successful admission into the Legion (which many did as they were battle-hardened veterans of many years of fighting) and survive five years of service, they would gain French residency and a clean slate with new papers and a new identity.

MRR: Your new album, *Have a Cunning Plan*, just came out on Trouble In Mind. How did that happen?
Yes, we are very excited about this record. Last year sometime we were invited to play a Trouble In Mind showcase kind of night at the Tote. Caroline from Parsnip organised it all for Bill (one of the label owners) as he was in town for a while and really wanted some of his favorite Melbourne bands to play all on the same night. After we played, Bill and I were chatting, and he handed me a business card and asked if we wanted to do a record. It was a bit like in the movies. Bill and Lisa from Trouble In Mind have been so supportive of Australian bands over the years, and we are stoked and thankful to be involved in such a great label.

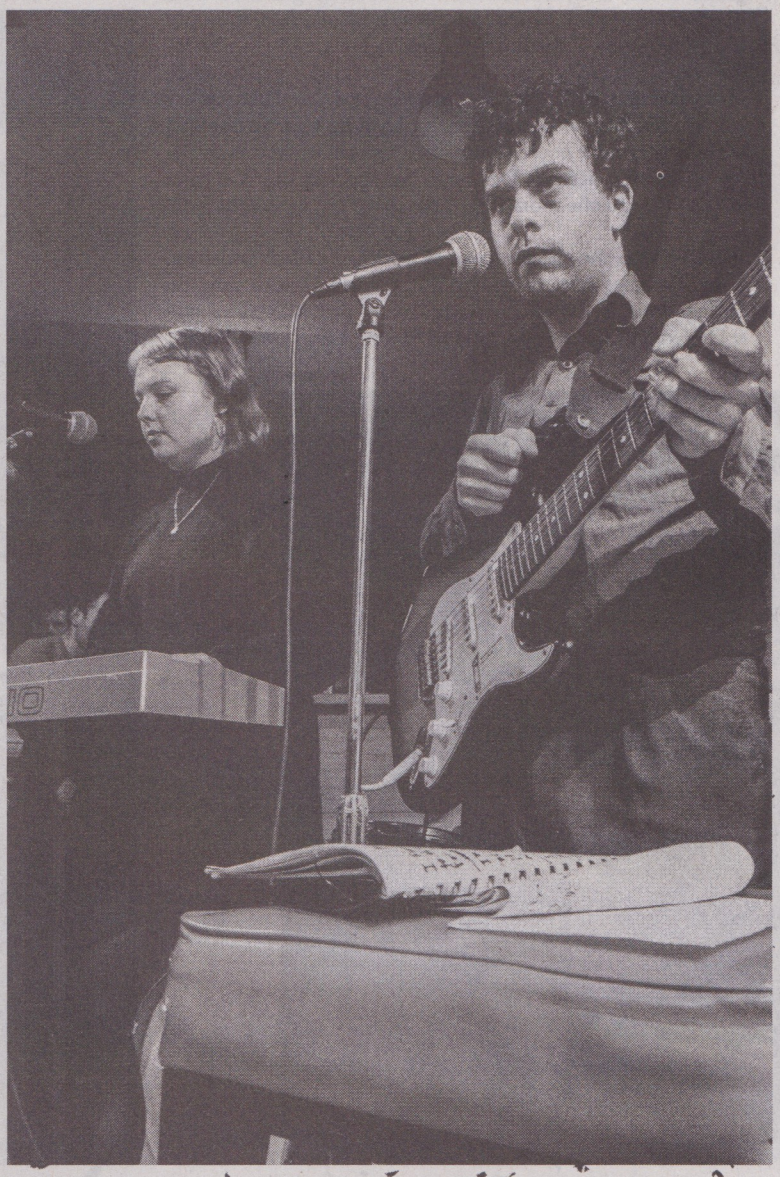
MRR: What about the record itself ?
It has some, but overall less historical references, and more localized observation I would say. I think it sounds different from our past releases but still sounds like us. We had six months before we had to hand it all in as a finished album art and all. We had the crux of an album ready for recording but were short a few songs, so I got to work on those and had the band playing them in no time. I think those last ones are my favourite. So we approached Al Montford (Terry, Total Control, UV Race) to record the album as I heard that he had started recording a few bands. He was fantastic at doing it and very supportive. We set up at our practice space I spoke of earlier and ended up recording twelve songs in a day, all live to tape. Then had a number of overdubbing sessions at Al's house in Preston. He's a great host, fantastic meals and coffee were flowing. Al is a legend and we are very thankful for him taking us on.

MRR: Any book recommendations?
Commando by Deneys Reitz. *Storm of Steel* by Ernst Junger. *Homage to Catalonia* by George Orwell. *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin. *Chickenhawk* by Robert Mason. *Agincourt* by Juliet Baker.

Thanks a lot for having me, Alex.

theshiftersofmelbourne.bandcamp.com

The Shifters will tour Europe in the spring 2019.



get related to groups like the Fall, Country Teasers, and the Velvet Underground in a positive sense, then that's great with me. Those aforementioned bands, I feel, are some of the more interesting, challenging and clever music to come out of "rock'n'roll" and I don't think we even come close to being in the same boat as them.

MRR: Outside of these bands, what do you listen to?
The Kinks, Beefheart, Yeah Yeah Noh, the Raincoats, Swell Maps, Pere Ubu, Doctor Octagon...I'm fairly musically predictable, really. I still listen to the music my parents got me into as a kid like the Animals, the Beatles, Bowie, early Cher, Dylan, Elmore James, etc.

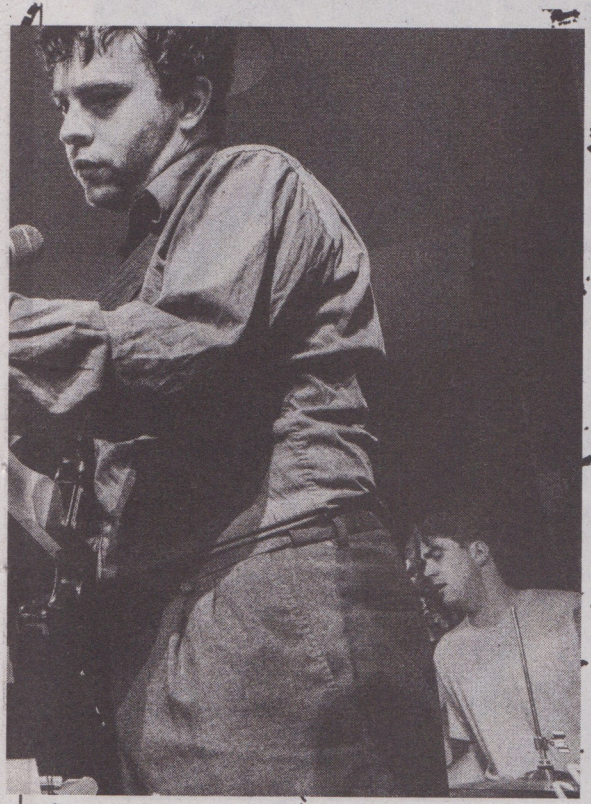
MRR: What about Oz bands ?
Some current Aus bands I dig: Parsnip, Primo!, Big Supermarket, Exek, the Faculty, Bloody Hell, Singing Lessons, Kitchens Floor, Terry, Nightclub. Some older Aus bands...Tactics, Essendon Airport, Rowland S. Howard, Go-Betweens, Bird Blobs, early Masters Apprentices.

MRR: Let's talk about your practice space. What does it look like, what kind of people do you meet there? Can you practice when you want?
We practice in an old house with Victorian origins down the end of a leafy suburban street in Coburg. Tom from the Faculty and Comfort35 Records and Liam from Bitch Prefect / Nightclub live there. It's great, it has a front veranda with couches gathered from hard rubbish (a few times a year residents of Melbourne put unwanted items / furniture / rubbish out on the streets for the council to collect, but the best items quickly get snatched up by keenest eye). We can't practice too late there as it's close to another house and they have young kids. Saying that though, they have never complained and tell us they enjoy the tunes. There is actually footage of the space in the "Creggan Shops" video—the room with the leopard picture on the wall.

MRR: Describe the process of writing a Shifters song.
It usually goes something like this... I will write a song on GarageBand at home fueled by many instant coffees and spliffs, which puts a weird twitchy / loose energy on the tunes. Then at the next practice I will do my best to remember what it was I was playing and show the others. They always come out different and mutate somewhat. I think it works well like that. The band flesh out my simpleton approach. The new 7" on Digital Regress has three of my solo GarageBand efforts on it, and they are more loose for sure. Occasionally Tristan or someone will approach with a riff or two and I will add words. Lou is great at coming up with keyboard ideas and Ryan is a bit of an arranger and into DJing. Chris adds flair! He's actually one of Melbourne's best drummers, but we have him in on acoustic guitar.

MRR: On a given week, how much time do you devote to the Shifters?
Between the five of us, it can be hard to organize practicing because of conflicting work hours and life in general. Sometimes we will go through a good patch and practice once a week, and others we will only practice last minute and sometimes not even that, which can work, but sometimes doesn't. Some weeks I might spend hours recording at home, but then I might go a month without picking up my guitar.

MRR: I'm intrigued by the lyrics to that song "Creggan Shops."
The song is written about growing up in Derry during the Troubles of the '60s and '70s. I have since I was young been interested in the happenings of Northern Ireland. I remember watching the film *In the*



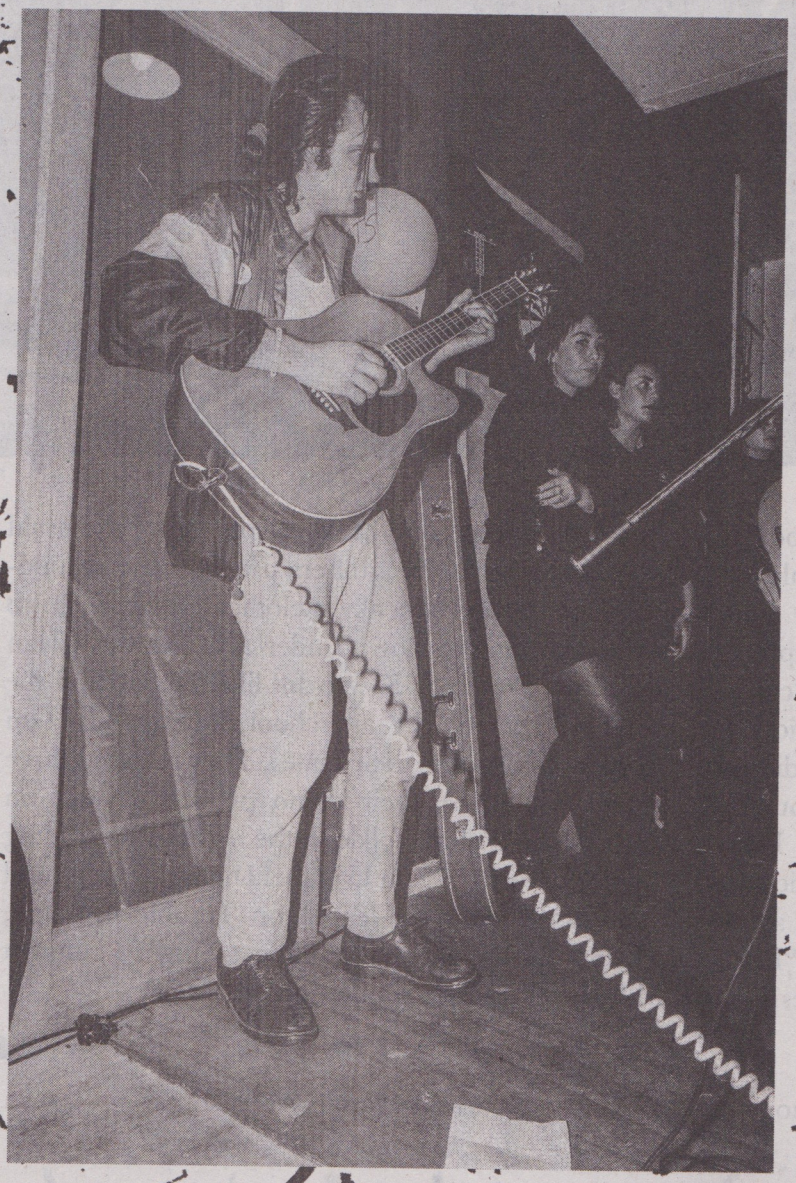
MRR: Your music feels really laid back. The vocals, especially, have a downright lazy quality. Tell us about your daily life.
I work as a cook during the day in the city. I live with my girlfriend and cat in a small Victorian cottage-type house. I'm quite the hermit, to be honest. I watch a lot of documentaries and play video games. Mates live in the general vicinity and we drink beers in each other's living rooms and listen to records. I hang out with [my bandmate] Tristan quite a bit at pubs and discuss things at hand. Tristan's great, he's a real oddball. There are shows pretty much every night in my area, so if I'm feeling up for it or someone particular is playing it's pretty easy to go watch and walk back home or to a mate's place for beers and hangs.

MRR: What about your neighborhood? What does it smell like? Who are the local characters that could star in a biopic?
I live in Collingwood. It's an inner city suburb of Melbourne with working class roots. It's being quickly gentrified with new apartments going up daily and rental prices skyrocketing. Melbourne sometimes feels like one big building site. Collingwood is cold in winter, as most rentals that we can afford don't have heating. Same goes for summer...hot! I live on the fringe of Smith Street, which is a rather hipster / tourist area flanked by council flats. It used to be a lot more rough. It's still got junkies and interesting folks and great old pubs, but the shops have changed a fair bit, although there is a record store resurgence on Johnston Street. You can still find cheap food. I think my favourite part of Collingwood is all of the different kinds of foods. The Tote is just up the street, as are many of the venues we play in. It's very handy to just walk home from a show. My neighborhood smells leafy in winter and sometimes pissy in summer. The autumn trees line most back streets beautifully. Behind my house is a Turkish old man hangout spot where I buy Turkish coffee and cheap orange soft drink. It's open late and you can smoke and watch Al Jazeera or Turkish *Days of our Lives*. He does cheap homemade food also.

MRR: Are people in Melbourne excited about the band?
The bands and friends we have around us in Melbourne are very supportive and it's a great city to be in right now for making music. Within the community here, some people would be excited about the band for sure, but we are by no means the most popular.

MRR: Last week I was in a record shop in Paris, and I talked with the seller about Oz music. He told me he sold 80 or so copies of your demo LP in a few months.
We have had quite a few messages from US and European labels / distros / bands over time, but we are definitely getting more interest in Europe since Future Folklore released the LP. That's amazing about the shop in Paris! I never would have thought. We would love to come over and play in the not too distant future, and it's in the works as we speak. Yann and Yohan from Future Folklore have been super supportive, and we are so thankful for them doing the record and sharing our music. The same goes for Paul Messis at Market Square, Ronnie from Digital Regress plus Alexa and Stanley from It Takes Two.

MRR: When you first talked about the band, did you agree you wanted to sound like anything in particular? Most reviews seem to mention the same bands—the Fall, the Country Teasers, the Velvet Underground, UK DIY bands, etc.
After living in the UK for a few years, I came home wanting to start a band that was an amalgamation of all of my favorite stuff, to try and release a record or two, and to support Ben Wallers [from the Country Teasers], all of which we have happily achieved. I don't think the music we make will ever be super popular or earn us much money, but if our releases



THE SHIFTERS

The Shifters live, work and play in Melbourne, Australia. They're the kind of band one would only describe as "punk" when discussing with music connoisseurs. They sound like a casually depressed adult rock band, more concerned with the "casual" part than with the "rock" one. People and critics have been calling them UK DIY, post-punk and indie pop. Their music feels laid back, nonchalant, puzzled, cold, warm, and sunny at the same time. Like a drunk country band playing to a stoned audience at the end of a particularly uneventful night, it sounds anything but melodramatic. It whispers "Life is beautiful" and "Life is ugly" and "Who cares?" and "I do" all in the same breath. Apart from the usual rock instruments, the Shifters use keys and second-hand violins and squeaky melodicas. They seem to owe something to down under acts like the Clean and Bitch Prefect, UK weirdos like the Fall and the Country Teasers, NY art-school dropouts like Lou Reed and Nico and their mates. They released three records in 2018—their demo pressed to wax on French label Future Folklore, the bedroom-sounding "Just Sat Down" 7" on US label Digital Regress, and their first proper full-length on Trouble in Mind, which sounds slightly more upbeat. Singer / guitarist Miles answered some questions for *MRR*.

Introduction and interview by Alex Simon.

Pictures by Jamie Wdziekonski.

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about what keeps us inspired with making art. I love good conversations and find them really inspiring to my work. Is this same for you? I wonder if you might be able to recall some conversations that have really had a provocative effect on your mind or very viscerally in your work.
That's a great question. I felt super connected the first time we met too. You were sitting on our indoor porch swing that's spray-painted gold, swaying. I felt connected forever from that conversation. I'm so happy to have our record on Sister Polygon because y'all care about music in a sincere and honest way. I'm trying to think of a good convo to share, but that kind of experience is difficult to describe. What I can say is that I get so fucking stimulated by good conversation that it makes me very high. It's how I feel playing music too. It's the ultimate connection. My mind races after a good lecture or someone openly sharing how they move through the world. People are generally nervous and guarded, but I'm always down to get into the near-death experience story with a total stranger. I lose copious amounts of energy in large groups but relish talking to one or two people at a time. That's why I love having this place as a refuge for creative thinkers. People come here and it's quiet and focused and we can share a meal and show one another the beautiful things we're putting out into the universe.

MRR: If you could cover one song, what would it be?
Generally, I don't enjoy playing other people's songs. Like I said since, I was a kid I've just always done things differently without even being conscious of it. For me to cover a song, you need to have something to offer or don't do it. Sometimes a cover is better than the original for sure, but a lot times it's a real butcher fest. It's cool to cover a band that inspires you as a way of connecting and showing your friends. Speaking of covers, I'm by no means an Elvis fan (I think to be an Elvis fan you have to have a velvet portrait of him somewhere in your house) but the other day when I was driving "How's The World Treating You?" came on, and I thought to myself, "I could see myself fuzzing this up." Philip and I recorded and put out a tour tape a couple years ago that had Silver Jews' "Trains Across the Sea" and Sonic Youth's "Schizophrenia." The song "Schizophrenia" I feel like has always been one of my favorite songs, even before, I was born if that makes sense. Not a cover, but a collaboration I'd like to make happen is to record some of my sister Anna Sky's songs. She's a decade older than me and showed me a lot of witchy secrets when I was little like Belly, the Breeders, and Sinead O'Connor. She's schizoaffective, so reality is more than just subjective for her. She's very strong and brutal and has written some stunning songs I hope to help in getting documented someday.

Thanks you Miranda and Katie for asking me these questions. If you made it this far, thanks for reading. And thanks to *Maximum Rocknroll* for giving me the space to rant.

thefuns.bandcamp.com

to death. It's crazy to teach that but for so many people simply *feeling* is a challenge.

MRR: What is your favorite album?
Dove. EVEL. The Bills. CLUE. (These are killer bands from Indiana, not an album!)

MRR: Do you like to tour?
Yes, I love it, but that means touring my way, which means I take my time and put together something beautiful. Something that is built by me and Philip and friends and artists. It means not playing shows back to back to back. It means no to playing in front of vinyl printed alcohol ads or during daylight because I hate it. Being in a band can be more than being in a bar then driving, being in a club then driving. Stage, van, party, blah blah, *no.* It can be spending time in a place and being present in the world rather than existing in bars and cars and gas stations and stages. It's fleeting. It means living outside of a system built on the greatest monetary gain only. It's not worth it to me otherwise. Too much experience gets compromised. The music industry is a black hole. Stay bright. Burn bright. You got to crush that shit into gold like a dying star.

MRR: Greatest show you've ever played?
Every house show. Bring back Bitchpork!

MRR: Having never experienced Bitchpork but regularly hearing people wax nostalgic about how epic it was (really did sound epic), I'd love to hear more about this music festival. Got any good stories?
Philip and I played Bitchpork I in 2009 as Dinosaurs in Outerspace. It was the year Times New Viking played. Philip and I have always loved their lyrics. That year, the shows were in a big warehouse I think they called The Future, with old wooden floors, where a bunch of weirdo artists lived in lofted beds. What I liked about Bitchpork is that it was alternative-alternative. It was really truly weird and uncensored. What I mean by "bring back Bitchpork" is to keep that spirit alive and to pass the torch. LGBTQIA / Black / women / POC / weirdos need to take over the world!!! I'm told CAVE started Bitchpork because their friends' bands from out of town could never get shows the weekend of Pitchfork and so organizing an avant-garde festival was a way around that. I don't have a specific crazy story. The whole thing was one big acid trip. What I remember most was that there was art everywhere. Covering the walls and ceilings. The ethos behind it is inspiring. With a ton of work and few people you can make a lot of big things happen outside the system. You gotta dream. It's the spirit of something like that happening that I'll always be attracted to. The harebrained-ness of it. Its core absurdness is what made it ever even transpire in the first place. Make your existential puppet show and perform it to whoever you can get to show up to your living room. Make whatever you can with what you have.

MRR: With something like Bitchpork in mind: I have to assume that someone like yourself who built their house specifically to share it with others for art-making is thinking about community in relation to art-making all the time. Maybe not actively, but more like its an app running in the background of your proverbial phone / brain. Am I correct, do you think about community and art a lot? I would love to hear some Jessee Rose Crane philosophies about that.
Jeez, yeah, I don't know what else to do with my time here. I really don't. I hate art and music a lot of the time. What mean is I hate commercial, elitist, patronizingly didactic, masturbatory arrogant egos. I stick to the basics so I don't lose my mind too much. Art changes consciousness. For me, real art is the opposite of elitist. It's without language and full of meaning. It's for and by everyone. I moved to this place having only seen the house once. Philip unlocked the door and in I stepped into dusty, dark, puke-green carpet and curtain-covered cave. I actually thought to myself, "We just have to get rid of the trash and paint the walls and this place will be great." In reality, it's been a seven-year process of rehabbing every room, one at time, including plumbing and electrical. Tom Hanks in *The Money Pit* paints a picture. There was a cast iron pipe running through the center of the house that had become so rusted there was only a trickle of water on the second floor. Philip and I tore out the second story toilet and discovered a petrified squirrel hanging out from the porcelain that had come in through the vent and into the attic only to become stuck and meet a gruesome end. There were boxes and boxes of every Christmas, Easter, birthday, or anniversary card that Philip's grandparents had received in their lifetime. There were five-foot cabinets full of pressed and folded men's white cotton briefs. So many mice skeletons with the contents of their stomachs still visible as the puke green carpet, and Big Red gum. I picked up a pretty, shiny, gold box the size of a Happy Meal, and I couldn't figure out how to open it. I shook it and clawed it and sunk when I somehow realized it was a box of cremains. I guess it's not unusual for no one to pick up your ashes.

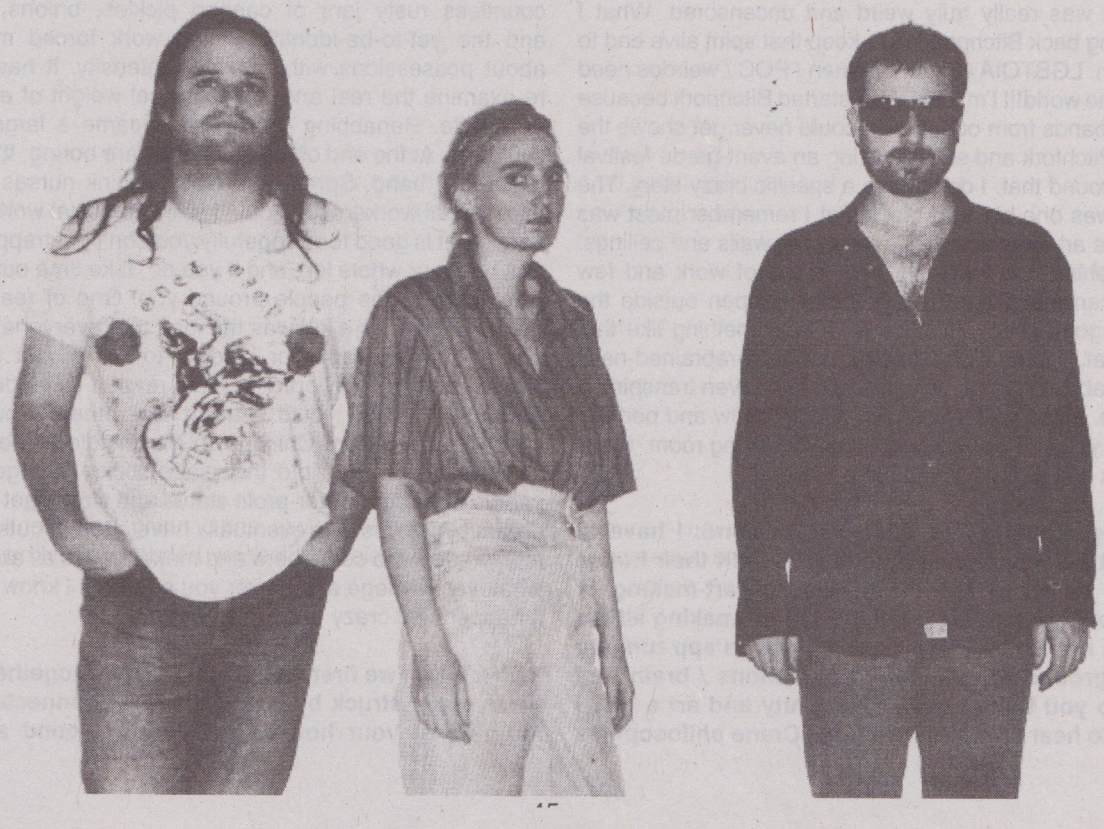
As an artist who makes work from mostly trash, of course I wanted to keep everything. On top of being creatively obsessive, I am also a sentimental person, so cleaning out the old house was nothing short of cathartic. We tore out and replaced every ceiling while bagging blackened cellulose insulation by the truck load. I scraped wallpaper and chucked countless rusty jars of canned pickles, onions, tomatoes, and the yet-to-be-identified. The work forced me to think about possessions with a fixated intensity. It has made me re-examine the real and metaphysical weight of every object in my life. Rehabbing the house became a large unending sculpture. At the end of the day bands are boring. It's not "cool" to be in a band. Spread the word. I think nurses are cool. I think social workers are cool. If you're a social worker and in a band, that is good too. Hopefully you don't get trapped working at a bar your whole life, and if you do, take time out for others. Contribute to the people around you. One of reasons I was drawn to punk as a kid was the idea that everyone was equal. There were no ranks or ladders to climb, just expression, feeling, and connection. The main reason I was drawn to this house is I knew I could share it with others. You got to be crazy to move from Chicago to the middle of nowhere. But all the work we put into this place sticks. The goal for next year is to file for not-for-profit status and slowly get funded. My dream of dreams is to eventually have enough outside support to pay people to come here and make art. It's all about sharing whatever privilege and power you possess. I know I can make it happen. I'm crazy enough to do it.

MRR: When we first met playing a show together last year, I was really struck by how quickly we connected the next morning at your house, just sitting around and talking

get absorbed into the Funs or Swear Beam. I have a lot of in between sounds I'd like to put on tape sometime, but I can barely keep up with documenting everything right now so we'll see. As much as the Funs, is a collaboration I feel like I have a lot of autonomy and control, so there's no drive for me to "go solo" right now. Maybe someday when Philip refuses to leave the house. (Legitimate growing concern.) The Funs and Rose Raft and art are all parts of the same atom.

MRR: You produce an impressive amount of material. How do you do it, Jessee Rose?
I write a song almost every time I sit and play the guitar. Most of them are one-offs that get lost to the ethereal ether. I hear a lot of music in my head. It's meditative and conditioned. Things I see have sounds to them. As soon as you become too aware of making, it becomes poison to creating. Independence makes freedom. I don't want to think about what others will think or who my audience is or if this will this sell. That shit waters creativity down like a glacier melting and this once pristine glowing blue and untouchable thing is gone for good. For me, it's all art all the time. I see a pile of sawdust and I'm like I can make that into a wolf swallowing the moon. (literally did that) I pour glue on the floor naked because I'm tired of washing glue stained clothes and it's better to just take a bath. While I'm in the bath I sing songs and take pictures of the tiny bubbles that bond to my body hair. These strange impulses make me happy, so I protect them. You have to protect that stuff and never let it get buried under the Hopelessly Mundane Regurgitated Bullshit. I am very fortunate. We've been able to build our Malibu Dream-funeral home-freakscapetopia out of other people's trash. I can walk downstairs and play music any time, and that fact alone has a lot to do with me making so much right now. I can record myself and have it sound how it is in my head. It's still a relatively new feeling, and It's surreal. I am so fucking grateful that I will never have to go to a cold, cement, beer soaked practice space with trashed dude bros lurking about lonely stairwells ever again. That shit affects me way too much. Bums me out. Burns me out. Scares me. Space is sacred. I moved to the country so I can afford to live how I want. There are no distractions here just stars and satiating sunsets that look like melting gold butter. There is nothing to do but make art.

MRR: I don't remember the source, but I remember reading an interview where the subject was postulating something like, "the secret to geniuses is that they are just making stuff all the time, constant output, but they're expert self-editors." How does the editorial process interact with your work?
Mike Montgomery, who recorded side B of our record *Is a Cult* at his studio Candyland, said to me, "You're oozing creativity and just trying to keep up," and his remark stuck with me because I feel that way. It's manic. It's obsessive. It's constant.. People create in different ways. Some people need to plan and to sketch and execute that plan perfectly. I need to flow, to space, and zone out in a stream of consciousness. Then I go back and tweak and refine. Since we record everything analog at home with no deadline. It's important impose our own limits. Philip will spend 30 hours mixing one song while I'm yelling, "it's done!" There is such a thing as over analysis. It's a balance between making something that comes from tapping into a free and real and raw part of myself then refining it but not picking at it to death. Like a scab. You got to let it grow. You got to let it heal. You can over work things and in my experience the second or third version is better than the 20th. Especially with recording because you can hear the life in it. The energy translates. It comes through. I teach freshman college art classes, and something I tell my students all the time is to loosen up and make intuitively, then come back and refine, but never beat it



for the video. The alien speaks to being a weirdo, or misfit, and embracing it, really celebrating it. I'm making my own world, and it all comes from using what you have, supporting marginalized peoples, challenging the establishment, and creating alternative networks.

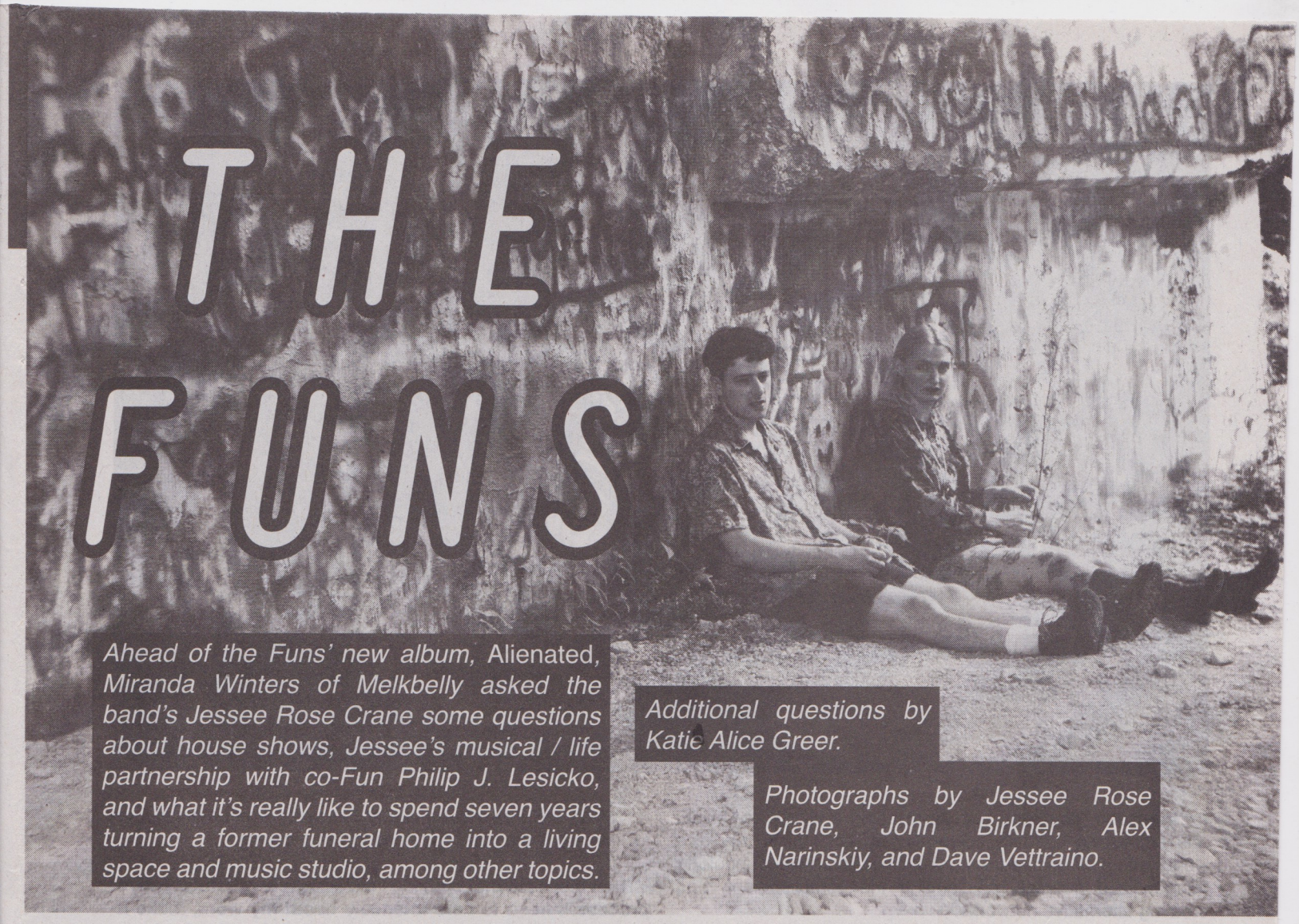
MRR: How do the Funs write a song?
I'll write a song and show it to Philip, or he'll write something and show it to me. Whoever writes the song primarily has the strongest input on its overall direction but we do shape things together. We fight *a lot* less then we used to. We've had to work at that with focused and intentional discipline more than the actual music but it's worth it. We are both wickedly intense individuals and push each other to be better humans. Fight with meaning. Find your truth. Speak your truth. Keep seeking.

MRR: You play both the guitar and drums like a goddamn champ. Which is your preferred instrument and why?
Hmm, that is tough. I have different forms of joy from both. I love sitting and playing guitar or bass by myself and the magic tingly sensation when the song comes and it feels like taking smiley face drugs. It's something to live for, and it's just for me before putting out into the world which can be a raw experience. Playing in a band is beautiful too. It's beautiful to make sounds with another being and have them complement and contemplate each other. It is a unique form of bonding and connection, and hopefully it's something that can be shared and received in a genuine way. Every time I step on a stage, I put everything out there good or bad. Playing the drums exorcises my demons and feels damn good. I am very much a person that marches to their own beat. I love simple, repetitive, lovely rhythm. I prefer making things up and remaining enthusiastically different. I put my whole self into making, but at the same time I don't give a fuck, which is the balance I need to be functional.

MRR: I also find that balance very necessary to my creative process. I need to care intensely about my work, make it something I'm passionate about, but I'm also like "lol fuck, I'm gonna die one day, I don't need to be an obsessive freak about this, it's not *that* important." Do you ever think about mortality much, in this way or in some other sense, and does it inform much of your creative process? I mean, y'all do live and create in a former funeral home.
I keep death in my pocket.

I take comfort in the fact that the earth will be destroyed by our sun one day. It gives me peace. It takes embracing your mortality to live well. I do like to think about someone listening to a song we made or reading this zine 50 years after I'm dead and still feeling a connection. But at the same time, I'm OK with disappearing. I'm OK with being forgotten. I don't believe children are in the cards for me. Philip and I talk about giving this house to a young artist after we're gone to keep the place going a bit longer, but I'm not holding my breath. Philip's parents are funeral directors in a small town, so as long as I've known him, he's had a dark passion for creating that's ramped into overdrive. All of our lyrics are about processing life, death, loss, and bonding. I'm grateful for my food, my home, my relationships, my band, John Birkner. Ultimately, you should be fulfilled by how you spend your time, or what the fuck are you doing?

MRR: How does your music partnership with Philip work? How is it different than your solo efforts?
It works because we work on it. It takes consistent care. I don't have any official solo recordings yet. Songs I write usually



THE FUNS

Ahead of the Funs' new album, Alienated, *Miranda Winters of Melkbelly asked the band's Jessee Rose Crane some questions about house shows, Jessee's musical / life partnership with co-Fun Philip J. Lesicko, and what it's really like to spend seven years turning a former funeral home into a living space and music studio, among other topics.*

Additional questions by Katie Alice Greer.

Photographs by Jessee Rose Crane, John Birkner, Alex Narinskiy, and Dave Vettraino.

MRR: Can you introduce yourself? Where do you live and what do you do?
My name is Jessee Rose Crane. I play drums and guitar in the Funs. I live in an artist and musician's residency called Rose Raft I built in New Douglas, Illinois. It's a recording studio, independent label (Manic Static), art gallery, and work space, all shoved into a formerly abandoned funeral home surrounded by soy and corn.

MRR: Who is Philip J. Lesicko?
Philip is my BFF. When I met him, he chained smoked cigs, didn't speak, couldn't grow facial hair, and his cheeks were real pink. We could share shirts because we were the same size. I used to give him piggy back rides on the magic, frozen beaches in Rogers Park [Chicago]. We didn't feel cold because we were manic and frightened by how much we fell in love. We never slept. Still don't. Philip and I make reverberations together on a telepathic level. We got married on our front porch and promised to support each other creatively for the rest of our lives, to live in this big old orange brick house, to nurture others, and make art until we die.

MRR: How long have you been making music?
I started playing violin when I when I was eight, and I spent hours messing around. I wouldn't even call it practice, because I wasn't practicing that much. I was just playing. There is joy in play that is important to never lose. I eventually quit because I was in orchestra for years, and creativity isn't generally rewarded in that setting. It got very boring and frustrating. I wanted to write my own music but my teachers were like, "No. No. You can't do that yet. You've got to play these old dead guy songs the same way every time." So I quit when I was teenager, shaved my head, and started playing bass in a radical punk band. It was the right thing to do. The first song I learned on bass was "Gigantic" when I was twelve, and from that moment in my bunk bed I've been writing songs ever since.

MRR: You're a visual artist as well as an audio one. What do you make, and what is its relationship (if any) to the sounds / songs you create?
Oh, wow, there is a ton of relationship. I don't separate the two. They are inextricable. The art informs the music and music makes the art and writing. A lot of artists operate this way, like Pipilotti Rist or Mark Mothersbaugh. It's not just music, it's a whole tiny universe to live in. I make sculptures that create sounds and sounds that support forms. It's a unified aesthetic. I just made a video for the song "Enemy" on our new record *Alienated* that was recorded beautifully by our dear one, Dave Vettraino at Rose Raft. I wrote "Enemy" on guitar and then I sculpted an eight-foot alien head to get a lot of the shots

lot easier. I wouldn't wanna get sick of Jabber, and I wouldn't wanna get sick of playing and hanging out with all of you. Having times of the year that we can go do our other band projects, work, and life stuff, but then come together to do these really fun bursts of practicing and shows and tours...
Jordan: It totally makes it more special.
Kelly: Exactly.
Jordan: It makes it extra fun. I get to be like, "I get to do this really fucking cool thing where people fly out a member of my band so we can play. OK! Life is pretty cool!"
Kelly: Life is cool!
Kris: It's an excuse to hang out!
Danny: It's great! We're a vacation band.
Kelly: "Sitting down with Jabber, it was clear how much they loved each other; they talked about it for 45 minutes straight..." *[laughter]*

MRR: I will definitely start the intro that way. Will you all tell me more about the content of your songs? It's clear the context is often about crushes!
Kris: Yeah! With this band, you know, we're not taking things too seriously. It's not a political band. We just want to write feel-good music. We write about crushes, love songs, break-up songs, a song about my childhood dog. Stuff like that, you know, silly stuff.
Danny: On the new EP, I have a song about my partner, who I like a lot. Sorry to publicly embarrass you in *Maximum Rocknroll*. There's one about the movie *Mean Girls*, where I basically just took the lyrics from the movie *Mean Girls*.

MRR: Another one about the movie *Mean Girls*?
Everyone: Oh, yeah.
Danny: The third song I wrote for the EP was on a super fucking cold day in Maine, and I wrote this song about how shit gets better. It was a very icy day and I wrote about how the ice melts, and how sometimes everything sucks, but it gets better and it'll be OK. I feel like everyone needs the occasional Danny Bailey uplifting song. One of our most popular songs, "Maybe Next Year," I wrote when I was in a real sad place, and everyone found it to be a really uplifting song, which rules!
Kelly: What I love about Jabber is that it's more about what's going on in each other's lives, and it doesn't have to take itself super seriously. It doesn't have to have a very specific message, it's just very relatable to a lot of people.
Danny: I try to be relatable. I just have a lot of feelings. I try to not mention any genders any more in any of my songs, because it'll make it way easier to translate, and also gender sucks. We've stopped playing any of the songs that mention that stuff. We want to make our songs more accessible to people, and people change. We all change.

MRR: That's a cool intentional move to make, because a lot of bands that sound like Jabber from 10-15 years ago are mostly cis-dude bands whining about how some girl broke his heart. *[laughter]*
Danny: Yeah, I'm not about that anymore.
Kelly: It's totally true. We tried to grow up a little more on this new EP, not just in gendered content, but we also don't wanna be 40 years old and singing about teenage crushes. It's a little more elevated than that, I'd like to think. There's still a lot of heart and heartbreak in it, but you don't wanna be that old person singing about prom and prom dates and stuff. That's a little cringe-worthy.
Jordan: I think this EP sounds different from our other stuff, too. Not just sonically, but also style-wise. I mean, it still sounds like Jabber, but it just sounds a little different and I like that. I don't like it when bands make the same album fourteen times in a row!

MRR: How do you think it sounds different?
Jordan: Stylistically, other than Kelly's song, it's a little bit slower, a little bit less pop punk and more just straight pop, in a good way. It's still pop punk.
Danny: It's heavily influenced by pop music.
Kris: Definitely '90s influenced. We bought a Totally Hits CD today.
Kelly: For you [Vicky]! We listened to it in the car on the way back from San Jose.
Jordan: I'd say this is EP is more Letters To Cleo's "Co-pilot."
Kelly: Such a fucking good song. And this EP has a lot of that early '60s-influenced pop beat, and Letters To Cleo obviously took a lot from that, in that song specifically. There are a lot of different references other than the very Ramones-core 2000s pop punk thing. I like that a lot. I like to hear bands evolving, and I like to be part of bands that evolve.
Danny: Thanks for making that pop beat, Kelly.
Jordan: Yeah!
Kris: This is the first EP where I'm not just playing all down strokes. *[laughter]*
Danny: The other band I'm in gets mad at me because I only know how to play down strokes. I'm like, "I'm trying!"
Jordan: Defend pop punk... *[laughter]*

MRR: I'm trying to defend pop punk within *Maximum Rocknroll*, which is why I'm interviewing you guys. *[laughter]*
Kelly: I love it.
Jordan: Thank you!
Kris: Yes!
Danny: You brave soul.
Jordan: This isn't chain punk, OK!?

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TOUR DATES:
11/28 - Pittsburgh, PA
11/29 - Buffalo, NY
11/30 - Toronto, ONT
12/1 - Ottawa, ONT
12/2 - Portland, ME
12/3 - Boston, MA
12/4 - New Haven, CT
12/5 - New Brunswick, NJ
12/6 - Richmond, VA
12/7 - Washington DC
12/8 - Brooklyn, NY
12/9 - Philadelphia, PA

Danny: I brought Jordan a scarf in Maine, because Composite went on tour right after Fest.
Jordan: Yeah, so Jabber played Fest, and then I flew from Fest to Pittsburgh so my other band could start tour. I couldn't pack the full range of clothing needed for that, because I was gonna be gone for three weeks total and my bass was my checked bag. It was fine. I only got so sick that I had to go to urgent care.
Kelly: Lots of Emergen-C, lots of hand-washing.
Danny: We won't be around as many people as we were at Fest.

MRR: But you will be cooped up in a van with a bunch of people.
Danny: It's a car! We're using Ramona's gear.
Kris: We're going on tour with Ramona from Philly, and Abby offered her car to us.
Jordan: Which is so nice!
Kris: Yeah! They'll be providing a backline for us, and they'll be driving their van.
Jordan: It's such a sweet set-up. It's gonna be so easy, we're so lucky.
Danny: We owe them big time. We should probably buy Abby a new car. *[laughter]*
Kris: With all that money we'll make...
Jordan: Yeah, once we get that Asian Man Records money...
Kris: But yeah, this tour is gonna be great.
Jordan: It'd be cool to do a couple of tours a year.

MRR: And then that level of comfort makes it easy to bring songs to the all's first band playing instruments. Playing music with people can feel so vulnerable.
Jordan: Yeah! I had played with a couple dinguses in high school for maybe two weeks, but all they wanted to do was write shitty Blink-182-style songs about wanting to fuck their step-moms. *[collective eugh]* Yeah, I peaced out on that shit real quick. That discouraged me from playing an instrument for a long time.
Kelly: I've only been in bands with men like twice. Most bands I've ever been in have just been with my closest non-dude friends, and I don't know that I could be in a band with just anyone. Again, to harken back to what I was saying before, I don't know how anyone can just join a band because it's there, rather than because the people in it are your friends who you're close with and feel comfortable being vulnerable with. Especially when it comes to writing songs.
Jordan: I'm sure there are a lot of bands where people are friends first, but there's so much ego at play, especially in bands full of cis-men. It's a fucking thing. But I feel like there's very little ego, here, and that makes it super easy, and conflicts don't really come up.

around the people you play with, and not just settle because you don't want to go out of your way to find people to play with. I feel very lucky to be involved in the projects that I'm in.
Danny: I feel like Jabber spoiled me, and now I'm very selective about who I play music with. You gotta be real easy to hang out with.

MRR: I mean, it must keep you in it if you're down to travel to do this band.
Danny: Yeah!
Jordan: And we're super lucky. Tonight is the second time we've had someone offer to fly Danny out. People really fucking love the songs that Kris and Danny have written. I mean, that's why I wanted to be in the band! I loved that first EP. I feel super lucky. Thanks for taking a chance on me! Like ABBA.
Danny: Jabber is always my first priority band-wise. It seems really strange in hindsight that I moved away from the Bay Area, but I just couldn't hang here anymore. And I'm glad I moved away, because now I feel like I can actually afford to do things like go on tour or take time off to fly to a festival. I feel like it's opened up a lot of doors for me, but it sucks that I'm not here all the time. But I do feel like Jabber's my first priority, and I save all my best songs for Jabber. Sorry, other bands. This is the band I have the most fun

Kelly: Yeah! Especially with this group of people.
Jordan: I can't imagine a group I'd rather be cooped in a small box of farts with.

MRR: It's really cool to hear about how you all feel so comfortable with each, especially Jabber being two of you table that are about crushes! And the '90s, of course, the two themes of this band.
Kris: It's super important to play with people you're comfortable with. It took me until moving out here to not have to settle for who I play music with. You should be able to decide that you want to be comfortable and feel safe

with, and it's the one I feel the most confident that my songs will come out sounding the best that they possibly can because we have such a good mix together. I believe in us so much!
Kelly: The distance makes it all the more special, too, because I feel like if Danny was here all the time and we played all the time, it would be great, but burn out would be a

to the table and tells me what to play, and that's great.

Kelly: Kris wrote "Tempting and Exhausting" on this new EP, and when we started to practice it just the two of us, they already had an idea of what I should do with the drums. They already had a full idea of what it should sound like in their head. So I was like, "Cool. Tell me and I'm happy to do it."

Danny: Kelly wrote a song on our new EP, too. She's the first member of Jabber that me and Kris have allowed to write a song.

MRR: How did you write a song as the drummer?

Kelly: I've been in other bands where I've written songs. Danny and I were joking that we should have a song that sounded like the Unlovables. So I was like, can I write a song that sounds like Danny trying to write an Unlovables song? And then I did! It was inspired by Danny's and my mutual love of this very upbeat pop punk style. It's kind of in the original style of Jabber. I was like, there has to be lots of harmonies, and this specific structure. I just had to wonder what it would be like if Danny was writing an Unlovables song, and "Take Me Out Tonight" is what came out.

Jordan: Subsequently, you wrote probably the longest and fastest Jabber song.

Kelly: I didn't mean to write the fastest Jabber song. We're all paying the price for that, myself included.

Jordan: You know what? You're making us better musicians.

Kris: It's fun, and it's a great song to play!

MRR: Will you play it at the Oakland Pride show tonight?

Kelly: Yeah! We're gonna play all the songs on the new EP.

Danny: Yeah, we'll play all the new songs, and a bunch of old songs.

Kris: All hits.

Danny: It's nice that we finally have enough songs that we don't have to play certain songs anymore.

Kelly: It's funny, because Jabber's never had a full length, so I don't think of us as a ton-of-songs band.

Danny: We're an EP band.

Kris: And splits.

Kelly: If you count all the songs on all the splits and EPs, I guess it's a lot of songs.

MRR: This upcoming release is another EP?

Kelly: It's actually a single-sided 12", and the other side is etched with some cool doodles that our friend Tom Lowell made.

Danny: It's beautiful.

Kelly: It essentially looks like what your middle school notebook might've looked like if you were artsy and cool.

Kris: It's all the things we love etched on.

Danny: For the insert, I had a bunch of our friends doodle the words "Jabber Forever" and send them to me. It was cool to be able to include all of our friends and people we love in the construction of the artwork. Asian Man Records is putting it out, and its official release date is October 12th, but we have a few that we'll sell at the show tonight.

Kris: Tonight and on tour will be the only times we're able to sell the records.

MRR: And you released one song with a music video. It's sounds so good! And looks so good! Great job on the editing, Kelly.

Kelly: Aw, thank you very much! Danny's man friend, Stefan, filmed some of it, like while we were recording, and Danny filmed some of it, and I filmed some of it, and I edited it together. It's the story of us hanging out, recording, and going to sing karaoke.

Kris: Which is, like, what we do!

Kelly: It's essentially a day in the life of Jabber.

MRR: And you all are going on your first tour ever as a band! How long have you even been a band?

Jordan: Jabber's been a band for six years!

Danny: We're leaving right after Thanksgiving pretty much, and we're starting in Pittsburgh. It's going up the Northeast and a little bit of Canada. Toronto and Ottawa, but not Montreal because they didn't give us the time of day.

Kelly: Montreal, you missed out.

Kris: Booking is hard.

Kelly: You played yourself, Montreal. *[laughter]*

Danny: So, yeah, we're doing a two week tour, and we've never done a tour. We've pretty much just been a vacation band up until this point. We fly out to Fest, play that, and fly home, which is fun! This will be a vacation, too, just a longer one. We finally deserve a longer vacation.

Kris: We always wanted to tour, but it'd never worked out, which is why we'd only do Fest. After Fest last year, we realized we should tour because we had the perfect line-up.

Jordan: And it was our 3rd year in a row playing Fest since becoming more active, so we wanted to do a thing of our own.

Kris: Let's write new music so we don't play the same set every year…

Jordan: Exactly.

MRR: Are you all skipping Fest because you're touring?

Everyone: Yes.

Danny: Also, they didn't ask us. They must have been tired of seeing us cover weird '90s music.

Jordan: Yeah, like, "We get it, you only like the '90s and Josie and the Pussycats…."

Kelly: And we're like, "Yeah, we do. What of it?"

Jordan: So we're gonna go play it for people who also like it.

Kelly: Exactly!

Kris: I feel like they expect bands now to hit them up, and it's cool that it seems like every year there are more and more new bands playing. It's cool they're getting that opportunity.

MRR: Fest seems awesome to play, but it seems like a better move to do a tour for a new release. Do you think you'll want to tour more after?

Kris: I always wanna tour.

Jordan: Yeah!

Danny: Kris is already trying to get us to do a West Coast tour.

Kelly: I want to do a West Coast tour because I moved away from the East Coast to not be there in winter, and now we're touring there in winter. It's gonna be real cold, there's the possibility of it snowing, but it's fine. I think I can handle it for two weeks.

Jordan: I was on tour on the East Coast last year, and other than Maine I fine with most of my clothing.

Jordan: I knew Danny from the internet and going to shows at Gilman. We weren't super close, but we always said hi to each other. Then I moved to Oakland in 2014. We're actually coming up on my 4-year Jabberversary.
Danny: Oh my god.
Kris: Has it been that long?!
Jordan: Yeah, it has! Isn't that fucking crazy? But yeah, the month before I moved, I hit both Kris and Danny up to be like, "Uhhh, I really like Jabber, and if you ever need a guitar player..." And, like, I had never played guitar in a band before, but they said I should practice with them. I was scared because I'd never played in a band before! But I was like, "I like both of these people, and I feel like I'll be comfortable with them."

Kris: We pretty much forced Jordan to join and be our best friend.
Jordan: I regret nothing. There was no forcing necessary. It was a very easy transition.
Danny: Before Jordan joined the band, I thought Jabber was like, done. I was in this really depressive state, because it felt like the end to something I thought was really special. We weren't glomming well as the group we were before, and we were kind of disagreeing on a lot of stuff. We had stopped playing shows, and were just pretty much playing one-off shows. I think the last show we played was with the Sugar Stems, because we both really wanted to play that show. I was really sad that Jabber was ending. I felt like it was over, and then Kris was like, "Let's have Jordan be in the band." And I was like "OK! We need to keep Jabber going!"
Jordan: "Let's fuel this rocket with some farts!" And I shot it into space. *[laughter]*
Danny: Everything just got more fun from then on.
Kelly: Jordan brings the fun.
Jordan: Everyone else is fun, I just talk about farts.

MRR: What about you, Kelly? When did you join?

Kelly: I moved here about three years ago, and for about a year I was just working on my career as a freelance photographer. I moved from New York with no job, by the seat of my pants, and I didn't play music for like a year, which was really sucky. Before I moved, Danny had written some songs and asked me to jam when I was visiting. Then she moved to Maine and I moved here almost at the same time.
Danny: We high-fived in the air.
Kelly: Yeah, so in that first year I was just working as hard as I could, and not playing music. I didn't have time, and I hadn't found anyone I really felt comfortable playing with. Then at some point in 2016 they were like, "Hey, you should be in Jabber." And I was like, "Yeah, I really should be." The first show I played with them was at This Is My Fest, and then at Gainesville Fest last year.
Jordan: I think literally a year ago this weekend was our first show with you!
Kris: That sounds about right!
Danny: Happy anniversary, Kelly!

MRR: It's really cool to hear about a band that had rough patches, is long-distance, but is still a band and seems stronger than ever! You all have an album that's about to come out?

Danny: Yeah! It's called *Jabber Forever*!
Jordan: Because we decided this is our last line-up.
Danny: This is it, we're happy. We've had too many line-up changes. Also, I wanted everybody to have to say "Jabber Forever."
Kris: And we really love the Spice Girls. *[laughter]*
Jordan: Yeah, so we named it after their album title. I feel like it's really easy to do stuff in Jabber. This band is really easy to be in because we were all already friends on some level before we started playing music together.
Danny: I've been friends with Kelly for over a decade, just cross-country and seeing each other at punk shows.
Jordan: I think I've probably known you *[Danny]* for like a decade.
Danny: Yeah. It's weird, because we've all been friends for so long in strange ways. I'm probably the common denominator; I introduced everyone.
Kelly: But if you know Danny, that's not surprising at all. Danny literally knows everyone. And I agree with you, Jordan, that this band is super easy to be in, because we're all friends first in a way. So, playing music together is very comfortable. It's very fun, and it's never a job. I've never understood people who are in bands because they get paid, or, you know, those bands where everyone clearly never hangs out.
Danny: Yeah, like never seeing each other off stage…
Kelly: Yeah, like, why are they playing music together? It should be fun, it should be enjoyment for you as well as for an audience, as opposed to just being for a paycheck.
Kris: Or to be cool.
Kelly: Yeah, I don't understand how you can be cool if you just play together on stage and not hang out with anyone or talk to anyone. It just seems like a terrible way to live.
Danny: Basically, if you're not farting into a microphone to make your bandmates laugh, what are you even doing? *[laughter]*
Jordan: I feel like, you know, obviously we've had a little bit of inactivity because Danny lives, what, 3,000 miles away? But even still, Kris, Kelly, and I will get together. If we know if we have a show coming up, we'll start practicing together once a week months beforehand just to get back in the swing of things.
Danny: I practice by myself.
Jordan: I look forward to weekly practices, because it's super fucking fun.
Danny: When we decided to start writing an album last year at Fest—because we sold enough stupid t-shirts to afford it—I honestly don't think I could've considered writing an album with people across the country. And we'd never done it before; in the time that I'd moved to Maine, we'd never written songs long-distance. So, I was a little anxious, but I was like, "Well, if I can't do it with them, I can't do it with anyone." And it worked out! It was surprisingly so easy. We use this app called Scratch Track, and it's instant. You just record it into the app, and then they have it. I don't have to upload anything.
Kelly: It's super easy. So, yeah, we'd get these things from Danny that were like, "Hey, I just came up with this idea, here it is..."
Kris: It was a really cool process doing that and being able to accomplish that. You know, with Danny sending us her ideas, we'd be like, "Oh, OK, cool, let's add more to it." Then we'd send it back to Danny, and she wouldn't know what to expect, and we'd just hope she liked it. She's say it sounded great, and then we'd continue working on it.
Danny: I always felt like Kris could hear what I was trying to do in my head. Even though I can't make the noises I mean to all the time, Kris can hear them, so it's fine. Kris makes them happen.
Kris: I think that's what helped a lot, too. From us already working together writing songs, we know how we both write.
Jordan: You know each other's song language.
Danny: I just feel like from the very beginning, it's always been really easy to work with you, Kris.
Kris: It was not hard at all doing this long-distance. I mean, I was really anxious, too, but it was like, "Oh, it's like you are here."

MRR: Danny, do you begin the majority of the songwriting?

Danny: I guess the majority, yeah. I start over half of them. Kris will bring full songs

MRR: Hi everyone! Who are you?
Danny: We're Jabber. I'm Danny, and I play the bass, sing, write songs.
Kris: I'm Kris, and I play guitar and sing as well.
Kelly: I'm Kelly, I play drums.
Jordan: And I'm Jordan! I play rhythm guitar.
Danny: Everybody sings a little bit.
Jordan: I mostly yell in the background.
Danny: We're good at harmonies.
Jordan: Yeah!

MRR: Who are the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence?
Danny: They're, like, drag nuns.
Jordan: They do really opulent, over-the-top, almost ren faire-style drag? It's really amazing.
Kelly: And each one of them has their own style, so there are some that are more kabuki-influenced, and some that are more ren faire-influenced. They're gorgeous and raise money for great causes. I'm very excited for today; I can't wait for the drag show stuff.
Danny: Same. I haven't seen their show, so I'm very excited.
Kelly: And it's our annual Bay Area show!
Danny: Yeah! I live in Portland, Maine, which is very far away. I moved there a little over three years ago.

Marc started a thread about Kris's YouTube videos of pop punk band covers that they would do. I was like, "oh, cool," and that put Kris on my radar. Eventually Kris started Dead Ringer, and someone posted about that in the Kris thread, so that's how I heard of that band. One day Kris posted on the Gilman fb page that Dead Ringer wanted to play there, and I booked at Gilman, so I asked them if they were in town and Kris said they lived here now! I was like, "Oh my god, why aren't we best friends?!"

Kelly: That's the one thing about this band that I first loved. When Danny originally sent out the first Jabber demo, or whatever became *Too Many Babes*, I was like, "Oh my god! There are so many good harmonies! I love this band, I want more of it!" *[laughter]* And then five years later she was like, "Hey, do you wanna be in this band?" And I was like, "Yeah! Yeah, I do!" *[laughter]*
Danny: Yeah, we're a really good band.
Everyone: *[laughter]*

MRR: Why do you say that so jokingly?
Kris: We don't take ourselves seriously.
Danny: I feel really weird when I say pompous stuff, even though I secretly believe it. *[laughter]*
Jordan: If you say it with a laugh, you sound like less of an asshole. *[laughter]*
Kelly: As Jordan spits mocha all over herself...

MRR: I just wanna point out that it's a special occasion that the four of you are all in the same place! What brings you all here today?
Danny: The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence wanted us to play their Oakland Pride celebration! They flew me out because they're amazing angels.

MRR: Damn, so you've been a long-distance band for over three years now?
Danny: Yeah, we're an LDR band. *[laughter]*

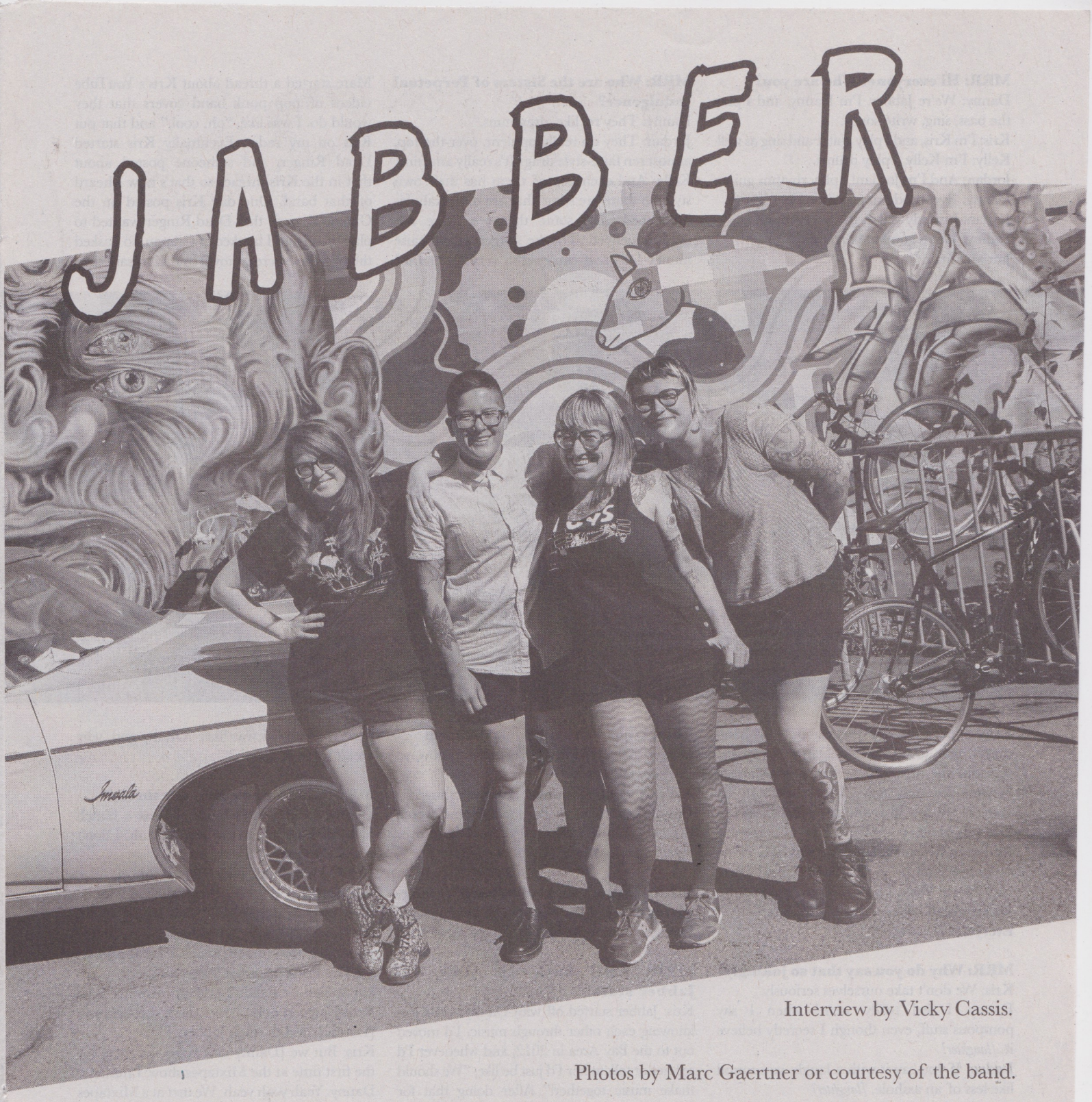
MRR: Let's back up. How did Jabber start?
Kris: Jabber started off with Danny and I just knowing each other through music. I'd moved out to the Bay Area in 2012, and whenever I'd see her or talk to her I'd just be like, "We should make music together!" After doing that for maybe eight months, it finally happened. The other band I was in at the time was pretty much done, and I was just ready to start a new project.
Danny: OK, but the real story of how we met...

MRR: Real story!
Danny: There was this stupid message board called the Pop Punk Message Bored that I used to post on all the time, and my friend

MRR: There was a Kris fan thread?
Danny: Yeah, pretty much. It was a bunch of turdy boys just being like, "oh, uh, I don't know about this..."
Kelly: Well, and Kris did a lot of, like, Jawbreaker and other emo-y stuff, so a lot of those guys would be like, "This is cool, check out what this person's doing." I definitely remember that thread, because I was also on the Pop Punk Message Bored for many years, but somehow I didn't end up meeting Kris until I moved here. I met them through you [Danny], and through Jabber.
Kris: But we [Danny and Kris] did meet for the first time at the Mixtapes show, I think.
Danny: Yeah yeah yeah. We met at a Mixtapes show, and it was like, with New Found Glory or something?
Kris: No, it was Set Your Goals...
Everyone: *[laughter]*
Jordan: That is so fuckin' 2012.

MRR: So, when did Jordan and Kelly come along?
Danny: Well, we had a few drummer changes, and Jordan's our second rhythm guitar player.

JABBER



Interview by Vicky Cassis.

Photos by Marc Gaertner or courtesy of the band.

Sitting down with Jabber, it was clear how much they loved each other; they talked about it for 45 minutes straight, finishing each other's sentences and laughing constantly. They've somehow collaboratively written a new EP as a long-distance band, available now on Asian Man Records, which to me is a testament to their strong bonds as friends and musicians. Their ability to grow together musically and lyrically, to write catchy, cohesive songs filled with harmonies, hooks, and leads, all despite distance, is truly a noteworthy feat. I feel lucky to have had the opportunity to catch them all in the same place at the same time! If you're on the East Coast, you too can get the full Jabber experience this fall while they're on tour!

LETTERS

Send letters to PO Box 460760, San Francisco, CA 94146 USA or to mrr@maximumrocknroll.com. Letters may be edited for length. Response not guaranteed.

Dear *MRR*,
I was hoping that I wouldn't have to write this letter, and that literally any kind of acknowledgement would have been made about the cover of issue 427. Since nothing has been addressed, I'll go ahead and process via a letter.

You had so many amazing bands get interviewed in issue 427, and you chose Proto Idiot for the cover? A bunch of white dudes, re-enacting slapstick comedy in military uniforms? I am immediately stuck with asking myself why? Why not highlight Marrón or Choked Up or Jabber? Why not use your power of press to uplift voices that need to be heard right now, who actually gave killer interviews, as oppose to uplifting white voices? Did you even read the Proto Idiot interview? Did you read any of the interviews? I know y'all edit and format everything that goes out to print, but after reading 427 I am a little baffled and I find it really frustrating that this happened. What was the process for putting together the cover of this mag? Or any layout in the mag? This is not the first time I have looked at a layout in *MRR*, saw a picture of white people acting a fool, and scratched my head. I believe it was 426 that y'all included a layout of a band called Lavender Flu and they were donning appropriative clothing...

I am feeling a real strong distrust towards the people creating content at *MRR* right now, and to me this is an issue of white supremacy in the magazine and I want to know what you are doing to dismantle it at *MRR*. What are you doing, as white people, to be accountable for content, the visibility of POC in the mag, and how are you owning your mistakes and missteps?

I think you all need to do better, turn inward and ask more questions, and ask yourselves how you can show up. You clearly haven't owned this cover as a mistake...it shouldn't take a letter to do so or get your attention. It's your responsibility to address the elephant in the room.

There's no more time for excuses, no more next times.

Stay up,
Ramy Silyan

Ramy,
I'd like to thank you for writing in and expressing the disappointment, hurt, and frustration that I'm sure a lot of others are feeling over the cover to 427. I'd like to offer an explanation—not an excuse—for how the cover came about, and I'd also like to offer my apologies for the pain caused by the decision.

The choice of the image for the cover of 427 was based entirely on the fact that Proto Idiot sent many large, high-resolution photos to us. In my experience, that is how most cover images at MRR *have been chosen, at least during the time that I've been here; we narrow it down to who has usable photos, then choose from those the band to feature based on a number of other factors. In this case, Proto Idiot was the only band who sent usable photos that had not been previously published elsewhere, hence they became the band on the cover.*

This method that I used for choosing a band for the cover is unfair and is focused entirely on those making the magazine, rather than the readers. No one looks at the cover of a magazine and assumes the photo was chosen out of convenience; rather, they assume it to be an endorsement, and for good reason. I should have put more effort into getting a photo of another band for the cover, a band that better represented what was inside and what we want this magazine to be. The responsibility for this decision was mine, and all of the blame should go to me. This magazine has a lot to work on in terms of its institutional white supremacy; I am unquestionably a part of that, and I need to do a better job of acknowledging and combatting it. This shows even in my reaction to the cover of 427; I should have seen immediately the hurt that it caused people, but I did not. I'd like to thank those who brought this issue to light for me.

I should not be the only one choosing who is on the cover of this magazine, a responsibility that holds monumental weight. Although we still have a long way to go we are working to change the decision-making processes at MRR. For this month's cover, rather than waiting until the last moment to make the front cover of the magazine, I proposed early in the month that Sial be on the cover and gave images to Nirzar, who created this month's cover. Nirzar then presented several cover options to a small group of MRR *workers (which I must note, for the sake of transparency, included Ramy Silyan). In future months, we plan to raise the issue of the cover image of each issue at one of our monthly meetings for those MRR shitworkers most involved with creating each issue of the magazine.*

I'm glad, Ramy, that you were pleased with most of the content in issue 428. I was too, and I hope that our decision to reprint most of it (with the permission of the bands) helps get these interviews the attention they deserve. I also hope that you—and the rest of MRR*'s shitworkers and readers—can view what we've done with this issue as a good faith effort to hold ourselves accountable and a step towards becoming the magazine we all want MRR to be: one that uplifts marginalized voices, one that listens rather than shutting down, and one that serves its readership and shitworkers.*

—Miranda Fisher

WONDERING WHAT'S UP WITH THE 427 REDO?

The original cover of 427 featured Proto Idiot, a band of three cisgender white men. It was a decision made in haste, which you can read more about in the letters section that follows.

Inside the magazine were numerous thoughtful, substantial interviews with bands who had somthing to say, including a number of bands featuring people of color. Unfortunately, because of the cover, those interviews were likely overlooked by many.

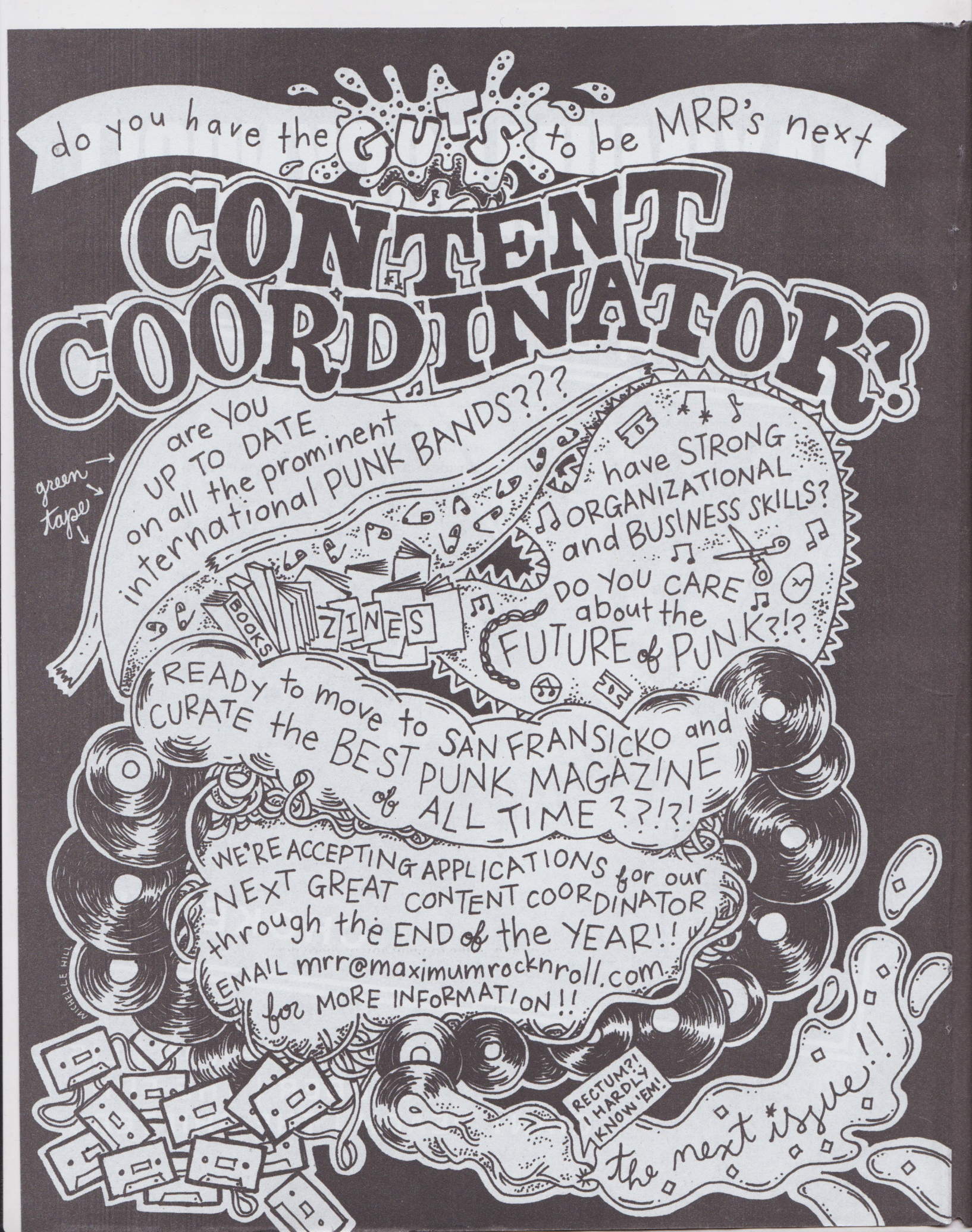
In the interest of making sure that these interviews are given the consideration and attention they deserve, we reached out to the bands featured in issue 427 to explain the situation and give them the option to have their interviews re-run in this issue. The bands featured here are the ones who opted in to re-running their interviews.

After much discussion with a number of different people both inside and outside of the magazine, we decided that the most effective way of giving these bands their due was to do a "redo" of the previous issue that can be read upside down and backwards in the issue you now hold in your hands.

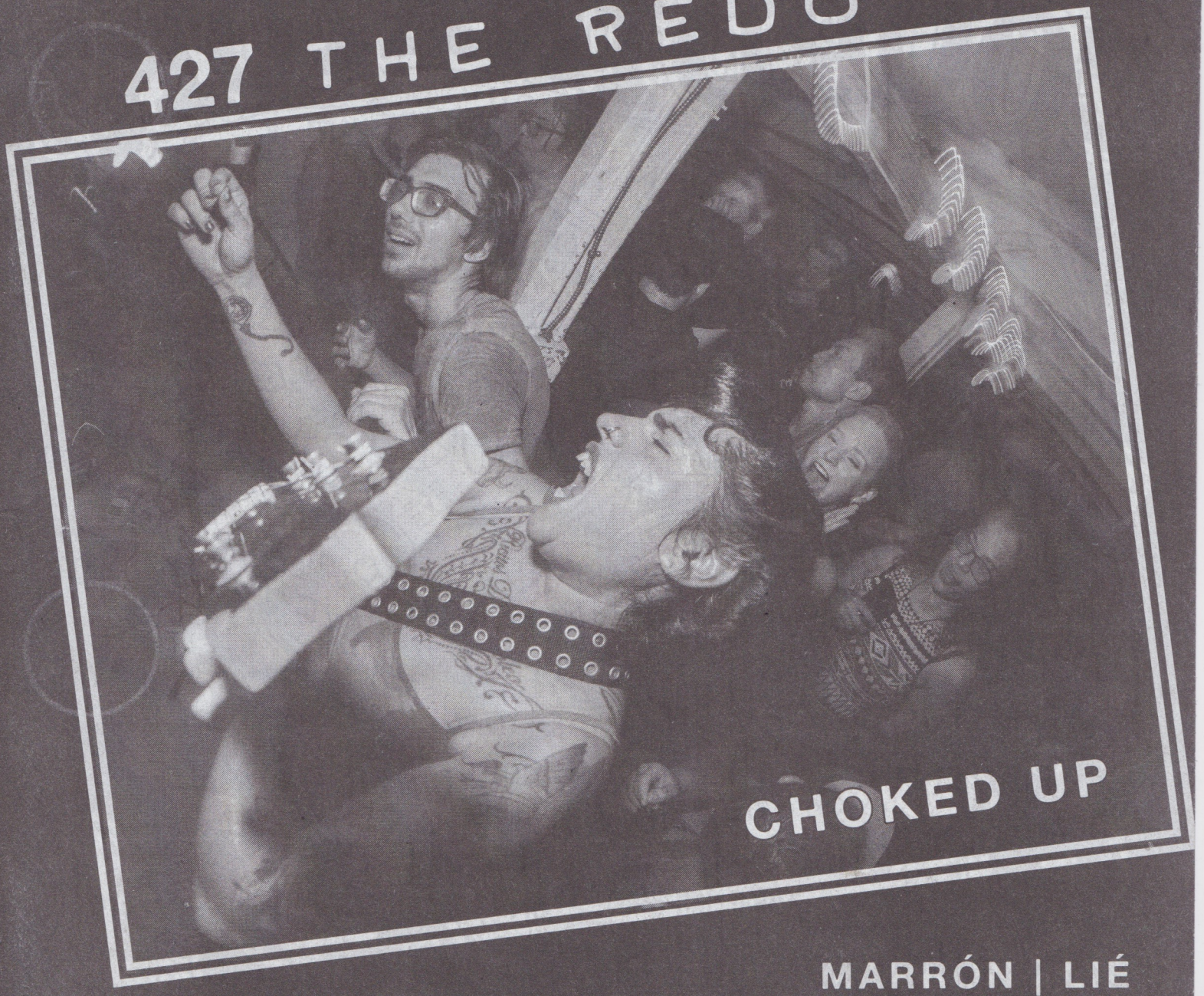
This is a decision that was made only with a lot of discussion and input from a large number of people. It's not a decision that was made rashly, because decisions at *MRR* should never be made rashly. We're working on implementing better decision-making policies at *MRR*, ones that empower many voices.

I'd like to apologize to all those harmed by the original cover of issue 427. I know that nothing can make up for this mistake, but want to hold ourselves accountable, and we hope that by re-running these interviews, we've taken the first step in doing so.

In the interest of transparency, we'd like to make all of our meeting notes, as well as Vicky's email to the bands offering to re-run their interviews, available to our readers. Please email mrr@maximumrocknroll.com if you'd like to view any of these documents.


do you have the GUTS to be MRR's next
CONTENT COORDINATOR?
are You UP TO DATE on all the prominent international PUNK BANDS???
green tape
have STRONG ORGANIZATIONAL and BUSINESS SKILLS?
DO YOU CARE about the FUTURE of PUNK?!?
BOOKS
ZINES
READY to move to SAN FRANSICKO and CURATE the BEST PUNK MAGAZINE of ALL TIME??!?!
WE'RE ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS for our NEXT GREAT CONTENT COORDINATOR through the END of the YEAR!!
EMAIL mrr@maximumrocknroll.com for MORE INFORMATION!!
RECTUM?! I HARDLY KNOW 'EM!
the next issue!!
MICHELLE HILL

MAXIMUMROCKNROLL



MARRÓN | LIÉ
JABBER | THE FUNS
GIANT PEACH | THE SHIFTERS